JESUS

by

ODIN GREGORY

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Jesus

The Tragedy of Man

By

ODIN GREGORY

Author of "Caius Gracchus"

Matthew XXIII: 29-33.

Second Edition

COLONY PUBLISHING CO., Inc.
Publishers · New York

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Printed by The Roycrofters in the United States of America

Prefatory Notes

To the Readers:—

1.

THE catastrophic condition of the peoples of the earth is claimed, by many, to be conclusive proof of the utter bankruptcy of Christianity. Assuming the existence of some privity between the thing named for him as the Christ, and the philosophy preached by Jesus of Nazareth, it seems useful to set before the eye of today a picture of the struggle between that which might, perhaps, better be denominated as "Christianism," and its antithesis,—Jehovism,—at the moment of the birth of the former. Such a presentation may serve to show what it is, truly, that has failed,—and what it is that has triumphed.

II.

Jesus was tortured and killed because he advanced theories that were unacceptable to the modishly proper people of his day. Jehovism always insists that the particular banalities which serve its uses of the moment are sprung of Divinity, and are sacredly obligatory on all men. "Conform or be crucified!" is its eternal slogan. To what monstrous stature has the cross of conformity grown! What oceans of human blood wash its frame!

III.

Whatever the world has had of spirituality dies under the pressure of that most sodden of all things: white-collared vulgarity. The evident of that which mankind, in its present situation, immediately faces in the absence of some great and overwhelming inspiration, coaxes and tugs at the pen for expatiation. But the temptation to respond must be resisted; for it is not the business of the painter to exhort, and credited prophesy has always been a privilege of the past, and an art of the long ago.

To the Actors:—

I.

Pray bear in mind that while your apparel and masking will necessarily have to be of the hour and place of the events depicted, the types you will represent are neither periodic nor racial:—they are of all times, and of every people of the world.

II.

The book carries very few stage directions. It would be idle for the writer to detail to the actor the manner in which an emotion shall be portrayed. Picking situations at random,—who shall indicate to the artist how to convey to the hearers the horror of the scourging of Jesus? Who shall instruct the woman acting the Magdala how she shall display the sudden inspiration to sacrifice herself to Samuel so as to save the life of the Nazarene? Who shall furnish stage directions for Samuel himself, in the last scene of the play, as his understanding of the meaning of life changes? These, and all like things, are for the interpreters who can live the action.

To the pundits and the Pharisees:—

Without entering into the puerilities of religious text controversy, the following general statement may not be amiss:—

Much,—perhaps all,—of what is said here has been said far better by others heretofore. The two lines on the uses of mercy are but a poor paraphrase of the rich Shakesperean verses. But a worthwhile thought will bear restating, even though the repetition be by a mean spokesman.

The accepted English version of the meaning of the derivatives of πείθω has been rejected here. This verb is variously translatable as "trust," "rely," "yield," "agree," "believe," "make friend," "obey," "assent," "have confidence," "persuade," "be confident" and so on. Out of all these possible meanings, certain religion builders picked the phrase "believe on me" as the one most satisfactory to them. This made possible the conception of Christianism, in the form of "Christianity," that bids for mass patronage by reason of the cheapness of admission to "salvation." The meaning that seems more reasonable, i.e.—poetically* "agree with me," and in prose "live as I have taught," presents a formula for "salvation" infinitely harder to follow than is the one favored by the theologians, but it seems more in accord with the pronouncement attributed to Jesus: "*The kingdom of God is within you.*"* In adopting this translation, the significance of the interpolated εἰς ἐμὲ has not been overlooked. Neither, however, has the epistle of James been disregarded, corrupted and changed as it has been, self-evidently. Also, the agreement between the three writers in Matthew XXIV, 5, 6, et seq., in Mark XIII, 6, 7, et seq., and in Luke XXI, 8, 9, et seq. has not failed to make its impression, as has the suggestion in Psalm LXXXII, 6.

It is not expected, of course, that these simple interpretations will be pleasing to those who refuse to acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth taught a way of life, not a method of worship.

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*There is authority for stating that among the Hebrews, the words "*poet*" and "*prophet*" were practically synonymous.

*Those who accept the gospels as a divine revelation are invited to consider Luke XVI, 16. This passage takes on an added significance if, in place, of the conventional "*every man presseth into it,*" the last phrase, αὐτὴν βιάζεται is given the authoritative reading;—"*useth violence against it.*"

The fact that the Hebraic equivalents of the words "Jahveh" and "Jehovah" were not so enunciated by the pious Jews has been disregarded in the interest of clarity.

The self-styled "Christians" whose superstitious qualms are stirred by the characterizations of the Hittite—Phoenician—Hebraic bloody tribal god, the Canaanite bull-god,—the Lord of the Slaughter-house Temple,—will do well to make earnest inquiry as to whether there is anything substantial or persuasive that identifies the "Heavenly Father" of even the half credited parts of the evangels with the deity of Exodus and of Deuteronomy. A little reading of history on the subject will not only enlighten, but astonish them.

In writing the text "love the stranger" instead of "love your enemies," a part of Tolstoi's reasoning has been followed.

ODIN GREGORY.

LOUIS V. DE FOE

NEVER saw the face of Louis V. De Foe. I do not think he ever saw mine. To the best of my information, he knew of me only as an individual who wrote under the pen name I used in publishing "Caius Gracchus." He was a very busy man. As dramatic editor of a great New York daily, the hours of his days and of his nights were full hours of toil. Yet, when asked to do so, De Foe found time carefully to read the first completed draft of "Caius Gracchus," and to criticize it at length. I recall vividly my resentment when I first read his analysis, and my later appreciation, when I had studied it repeatedly, and had begun to understand the quality of its writer's vision and understanding, and his desire to be helpful. I tore to shreds that which I had regarded as my finished work, and rewrote it,—more than once. And of all the pleasing things that have come to me since the publication of that book, there is not one that I treasure more than Louis V. De Foe's personal note of commendation of it in its final form.

In the winter of 1921, I again presumed on De Foe's generosity. I asked him to read the manuscript of "Jesus." He wrote me that he was overwhelmed with work, but that if I could wait a few weeks, he would comply with my request. I felt ashamed to trespass as I had done, but, having deliberately adopted a style for this composition different from any used by me before, I did want De Foe's opinion. I received it:—eight pages of banter, of criticism, of suggestion, of encouragement.

Every word was precious. For the better part of two years I had read, in available hours, preparing to write this play; De Foe approved and disapproved certain of my authorities almost as if he had been looking over my shoulder some of that time. It was astonishing. And, although written to an utter stranger, it was such a letter as one might have sent to an intimate, whose personal affairs were matters of concern to its writer.

Louis V. De Foe is dead. A great gentleman is no more. For years his published criticisms of plays constituted an open school for the instruction of those interested in the American drama. His profound knowledge of the art, the fineness and largeness of his mind, and his inherent kindliness, all showed in every line of his hasty daily writings. It is hard to make one's self feel that so splendid a serving spirit can go out, and pass into nothingness forever. O.G.

THAT I have written here, has been.
The grating words have rolled from curling
tongues,
The hateful breaths have pounded on the air,
The evil eyes have stabbed the cleanly light.
These things have been, as I have written here.
More:—I have looked into the present face
Of that which is mankind, and, gazing through,
Mine eyes have seen its face of long ago.
Both, both mean things are one. One face, one thought,
One venomed spirit, and one venomed voice:
The voice that sounded in the dimming ears
Of him who writhed and died on Jahveh's cross;
The voice of vengeance, feigning grace as law;
The voice of greed, attuned to sing as thrift;
The voice of vice, bedight with stolen tones
To seem the voice of virtue.
This I have heard,
And hearing, I have written. Let no man
Hold ear for my entreaty, or await
My suppliant eye. Here is written what has been,
And that which is this day. These lines will meet
The old-time cunning eyes, the agile brains
That lord the leprous pens of pandery,
The spirits pledged to knavery and guile,
The ghastly evils tricked with false-hued garb,
With elbow-lifting piety, and lash,
As were the ones who frothèd " To the cross! "
And they will cry " The liar! To the cross! "
While loutish throats rasp in the murderous growl,
And knotted hands claw for their brutish ends.
Obscene respectability will stretch
Its fetid maw to close on these free words,
And having slimed them with its reeking liquor,
Will strain to melt them to a formless pith.
But what is written here has been, and is.

That is my challenge, welt what skin it may.
Rear quarrel at your will! Spit, stone, sneer, laugh,—
Play on the cheap array of jangling strings
That find sure answer in the sodden brains
Of poor bestiality aflame as zeal!
Pretend to scorn, to judgment, to high thought!
'T was you, 't was you,—you wrung that Felon's tears
Who saw your wretched souls ungarbed, undaubed,
And, sickened of your flavor, sighed " 'T is time! "
Then died, half scorning, wholly pitying you. . . .
You wide translators of the simple text,—
You smugly righteous,—pledged to pleasant deafness,—
You bargainers and traffickers with God,—
You worshippers of Jahveh, Lord of Hosts,—
You kneelers at the shrine of El, the Baal,—
You bartered judges, practising pollution,—
You jailers of the disagreeing tongue,—
You stiff, proud marchers to the barking drum,—
You mouthing gang-leaders of creeds, tribes, races,—
You priests of strife,—you gluttons of men's tears,—
You vassals of the sneering, knowing Jew,
Who laughs to hear you mumble " Jesus! " " Jesus! "
The while cadavers lift you to craved heights,—
To you this word:
You crucify the Christ in every hour:
Today, tomorrow, as you 've ever done!
I see, I see your dreadful arms rise, fall,
Your bloody nails rip in the shrinking flesh,
Your hard and cruel eyes proclaim your joy,
As you drive in, and in, and in . . . .
Go polish up some mirrored surface. There,
Look deeply into what's your stuff:—yourselves;
In honesty . . . . In honesty . . . .
Some murdered Jesus: him you call " Lord God."
Who are they? Know you them? Gaze . . . . Gaze again . . . .
So,— now you know . . . . Yea,—now you know!
It is of you I write! You have been. You are.
Ah! Shall you always, always, always be?

Dramatis Personæ

The Voice

Second Voice

Third Voice

Samuel, a merchant, and member of the Sanhedrin

Judas of Kerioth, kinsman of Samuel

Isaac, son of Samuel

Esther, daughter of Samuel

Claudius, a Roman gentleman

Mago, a Carthaginian captain

Peter, a Galilean ex-fisherman

Mary, the Magdala, a reformed harlot

Martha, a follower of the Nazarene

Jochanan, a member of the Sanhedrin

Judges, Zadics, Witnesses, Guards, etc.

Prelude

In space.

ACT I

House of Samuel. Thursday morning.

ACT II

House of Simon the leper. Thursday afternoon.

ACT III

Garden of the Wine-press. Thursday night.

ACT IV

Ante-chamber of the Sanhedrin. Before daybreak, and daybreak of Friday.

ACT V

Roof of the house of Simon the leper. Friday afternoon.

Postlude

The theatre.

PRELUDE

Darkness in space.

[The earth is shown as a small floating dot]

The Voice:

We near. There is resistance. Something sour,
And stale.

Second Voice:

And I must stop.

Third Voice:

No further. Who?

Second Voice:

It is the Will.

Third Voice:

And who?

Second Voice:

A beam of love.

Third Voice:

Not for this region.

Second Voice:

What is willed, is willed.

The Voice:

I do not like that speck. It frets me....

Third Voice:

This place is not for love; it is for strife:
It is the heritage of hate and lust.
Why does the Will send this warm shaft to me?

Second Voice:

There moves an hour of another birth.
This beam declares its coming. It must pass.

Third Voice:

I am made most uneasy by this ray.
But 't is too faint. 'T will fail. Or,-or,-ho-ho!
I 'll vanquish it, and trim it to my use!
A brush! A battle! Ho-ho-ho! Go on!

The Voice:

Alas, that I must thither!

Second Voice:

Go. Farewell.

The passage of earth-years is indicated by thirty-four low musical sounds, given rapidly. Full lights come on instantly thereafter, simultaneously with SAMUEL'S first word in Act I.

ACT I

House of Samuel.

[The curtain discloses SAMUEL chasing MARY, the MAGDALA]

Samuel:

Out, strumpet! Out! Out of this honest home!

Judas:

Wait for me at the public road! I 'll come!

[Exit MARY]

Samuel: [*to Esther*]

Go scrub the sill!

Esther:

But, father—

Samuel:

Scrub the sill!
And then go scrub your hands, that have been soiled
With the corruption of that filthy step.

[ESTHER wipes sill with cloth, then washes her hands. SAMUEL claps his hands. Enter servant]

Samuel: [*to servant*]

Command my son.

[Exit servant]

Or words, or blows, must serve
Their several uses in this house today.

[Enter ISAAC]

Isaac:

My father!

Samuel:

Stand, my son. Give me attention.
This is an honest merchant's honest house;
A place where God is feared, the Law is obeyed,

And Israel's prophets are revered. The truth
Finds welcome at this threshold. In these walls
Dwell purity, our ancient faith, and honor.
So have I boasted to all men, and so
This home has been.

Isaac:

Has been?

Samuel:

So whisper says:—
The whistling whisper for which no lips round,
But which resounds within the deepest crypts.

Isaac:

Who dares,—

Samuel:

Stay, son. The bruiting throat makes dull
The ear's perception. Still. An hour ago,
I left this door disdainful of the hints
That slurring tongues had freely sown about
Among the fields of houses of the city.
My wilful pride betrayed me to unsense.
For, lo,—when, unexpectedly, I came
To fit my household for two alien guests,
I found, within my private walls, a drab:—
A mangy, stinking drab!

Isaac:

A drab!

Esther:

Nay, father—
[JUDAS makes signal of caution to ESTHER]

Samuel: [*to Esther*]

Be silent! Will you clip your father's speech?
Perhaps you 've learned that, too?

Judas:

The fault is mine,
Your blame should likewise follow me, alone.

Samuel:

The fault is yours? 'T is well to call it "fault!"
The fault is yours? Well, then, and did you
bring
Your scarlet lady to this honest house
To teach its virgin daughter matron's ways?

Judas:

Sir! Do not be unjust! The flames of anger
Consume your reason.

Isaac:

Hold your tongue, you upstart,
Until I know what saying 's to be said,
Whereon I'll speak for what concerns our honor.

Esther: [*moves toward door*]

I will not stay.

Samuel:

You 'll stay. You come and go
At beck and bid. I am your thought, your will!
[*to Judas*]
It seems your judgment differs from our own.
It seems we are in error, as you say.
It seems your wisdom is the better part,
And you, sir clerk, have something to be heard.
We humbly plead forgiveness for our anger.
We agèd men are backward in our knowledge.
So be you pleased to treat us with soft kindness,
And deign to tell us why your novel sense
Has brought a brothel-lady to our daughter?

Isaac:

I will not hear!

Samuel:

Your soft-brained father bids it.
This stranger in our house is very wise.
So, let us taste the honey of his learning.
[*to Judas*]
Son of my kinsman Simon:—when you came,
I took you in my house, and in my ventures,

And gave you, here, an honorable home.
I gave you such a welcome as I might
Have given to a second lovèd son.
I did not check your absences, neglects.
I neither whipped nor reined. How have you paid me?
Tell me, and tell my son. Say what dishonor
You have brought hither? Say what putrid stew
You have made welcome in these cleanly walls,—
And why. I 'll humbly stand and listen, clerk.
But speak your speech most quickly, for my wit-springs
Are sorely pressed by such pursuing anger
As our Jehovah loosed to smite th' Egyptians.
Speak on! Nay, stop!

[Claps his hands. Enter servant]

[*to servant*]

Make ready for two aliens
Who come as guests. The alien cups and plates.

[Servant bows and exits]

[*to Esther*]

Go, you above, and watch to see approaching
My Carthaginian captain, and with him
The Roman quarry-owner,—that fellow—

Esther:

The Roman,—Claudius? Yea,—I remember.
The same who came last year, and went away?

Samuel:

You have a mind for those harsh pagan names.
He comes today. I 've need of his milk-marbles
To build more tombs for Jews grown Roman-mad.

Esther: [*to herself*]

The Roman back!

[Exit ESTHER]

Judas: [*to himself*]

" The Roman,—Claudius? Yea,—
I remember—"

Samuel: [*to Judas*]
I listen. Sing! Bark! Sputter!

Judas:
Come, sir: let not the heat of anger dry
The well-spring of your judgment. If I 've wronged you,
Or yours, or this, your household, I 'll bow low,
And take my chastisement. But it is written
No man is judged unheard.

Samuel:
I hear you, then.
Flap on.

Judas:
I 'm of Judea,—sacred name!
Judea,—chosen bride of Heaven's God,
The marked one of Jehovah: she whose sword
Once flashed before the world unturned, unstained,
Unconquerable and unconquered. She
Whose name once meant " the mistress," and she, she,
Who sidles now, the furtive, prodded serf
Of idol-rearing Rome.

Samuel:
Hush!
[Motions to Isaac, who closes the door that leads outward]

Judas:
Shame, O shame,
To hiss a " hush " and latch the outer door,
At merest hinting of our degradation.

Samuel:
But caution springs from judgment.

Judas:
Yea, I know—
Nurse caution, pad the palate, veil the eye,
Smile pleasingly, and bow respectful head
Lest armed authority fall on you. Yea,
I know the maxims of the sapient. But
I know, also, the tumult of my blood;

I know the stabbing of my foot and hand;
I know the acid of my burning bile;
I know the bellow of mine inner voice
That calls "Rebel!" and I have known it, sirs,
These many years. But always nothingness
Showed to my searching eye. To cower on,
A suitor of the conquerors? By Him
Who spoke from Sinai,—should I, like a dog,
Take bone and whipping and, with fawning wag,
Creep to the master's feet,—a serving thing?
For you, or you, but not for me!

Isaac:

Point not
At me. I am no cur,—no more than you.
I, too,—

Samuel:

Son: silence. Rash avowals are
The twins of free confession. One listening ear
Is worth a hundred clacking tongues.
[*to Judas*]
Speak on.

Judas:

Yea, I 'll speak on, and fearlessly, alas;
Because there 's naught to fear. Would that there were,
And that I had to hunt some secret stall
Wherein to breathe my sense through shielding hands,
Lest that our humblers hear me. Would it were so . . . .
I had ambitions, as you know. I craved
For something finer than to slink through life
A jostled barterer in mine own country:
The scorn of foreign coxcombs, ruled and held
To things I must and things I must not, as
Some chained barbarian captive from the wilds.
I 'd live in self respect, or not at all!

Isaac:

Enough of that. We know. What faithful son
Of this, our sacred land, has not so suffered,
And suffering, sought means—

Samuel: [*to Isaac*]

Boy,—stop!

Judas:

I searched.
I served on Herod, loitered near to Pilate,
Cocked ear to rumor. Nothing. Nothing. . . .
Then
A shaft of light pierced through the dreadful
texture
Of the enfolding night. Word came of one
Who rode our northern valleys, where he
preached
A land united. He would hear no growl
Of man against his fellow. We were all
Spawn of a common Father: Galilean,
Judean and Samaritan.

Samuel:

I spit
On that uncleanliness!

Judas:

Yea,—there 's our fault.
And there 's what drew me. If the foreign rope
Is to be severed from about our necks,
Our hands must wield the weight of all the
metals
Forged into one offensive blade.

Samuel:

What? What?
To join us with Samaritans? God's curses!
As well tie up a sacrificial lamb
With swine-meat. Pah!

Isaac:

But hear him.

Judas:

Let me on.
I went, and heard. What was it that I heard?
I know not, though I know it,—every word.
But this I do know: that he spoke winningly
Of brotherhood and of the foretold day,
And taught all hearers to repeat his words.
Yea,—look you,—with mine own eyes I saw men
And women,—many women,—come and hear,
Who, hearing, cried "Messiah!" So I knew
That here was one who could unite us all,
The north, the middle, and mine own proud south,
To do what must be done. I joined his band
Of fond familiars—

Samuel:

Ah,—so,—the gossip is true!

Judas:

I am of them.

Isaac:

And you live communally?
It must be ghastly with so strange a man.
What is he?

Judas:

He is like other men, but fain
Would seem unlike. There 's an aloofness in him
That often irks me, much. 'T is not to call,
In carelessness, "Hey, Jesus!" 'T is not to sound
His comrade's back, to thumb his friendly side,
Or mock-assail his festive beard. When mirthful,—
And he is often that, although his mirth
Seems bashful, mild, and modest,—or when adroop,—
Which he is mostly,—be he in common tasks,
Or in debate, or frenzy: always, always,
He is apart. His veriest menial service

He looks to robe in purple dignity.
He is arrogant of knowledge. He pronounces
As one would say: "You grope, but I—I know."
There have been times I 've lost my sure perception
In the deep pools of his persuasive visions,
And felt my saneness melting to strange phantasms . . . .
Yea, I have almost loved him . . . . Almost loved him . . . .
He has the trick of witchcraft. That is certain.
I've often thought him present where he was not,
As now —

[Looks about, as in fear. A moment's silence]

Samuel:

Fool! To your tale!

Judas:

Did you not feel
A black, cold, stabbing wind? There was a wind?

Samuel:

You blither. Next you 'll gab of miracles!

Judas:

You 've heard?

Samuel:

These eye-deceiving jugglers! Pish!
The shackled hand commands no wonder-works.
Wait till he 's jailed . . . . Your tale!

Judas:

Yea, yea. My tale.
And yet,—there was a chill . . . . I tell you, sir,
I 'd fear to hate him!

Isaac:

Fear to hate?

Judas:

I 've said.
For, he has taught and taught till I 'm obsessed:
" The wage of hate is death . . . ."

Samuel:

We are no nurslings
To find amusement in such waggery.
"The wage of hate is death!" Ha-ha! Your tale!

Judas:

It has no length. We are twelve. Of these,
I am the only southron. The others
Are of his own. To make myself one prized,
I took the bag. 'T was flat. To every copper
I added ten from mine own purse. We journeyed
More freely, and this speaker spoke and called
More freely, too. They who had barely inched
On faltering hunger, scorned the reaching miles
On swaggering plenty. Boldness drew submission.
The few of yesterday became today's huge throngs.
Men love the gaining cause. The bulging purse
Proclaims its carrier approved of heaven.
With every sun, our fortunes bore new crops.
And still, O miracle! Rome saw not, heard not!
There was no menace, no undoing thrust.

Samuel:

Yea,—and good cause.

Isaac:

I 'll wager. O you fool!

Judas:

Hear on. There dawned a day, at last, when I
Shaped up the issue. The rising hour had shown
To challenge and to do. Our fame had spread
To many who had never seen or felt us.
Some came from far off places with warm bids
That were entreaties. Now I took my stand.
I urged that David's banner be unfurled,
And men be called to circle round its staff,
In one bold stroke for freedom and our God.

Samuel:

And then—

Judas:

Ah,—why press on? My mouth is vinegar.
This leader, whom I had followed and had served,
This one of all who had the artful tongue
To stir the sluggish folk; he who could mount
The princely steps, be King of all our tribes,
Be Emperor of all the eastern nations,
Said....

Isaac:

Well,—he said—

Samuel:

Come, say it you!

Judas:

He said:—
"I do not rule men's bodies:—I serve their minds."

Samuel:

Ha, ha!

Isaac:

And then—

Judas:

We jousted at Capernaum.
I did not storm his will myself, but deftly
Fed fire to the tinder of the mob,
Which blazed about him, crackling: "Lead the fight!"
To which he bleated: "Nay; for I am Peace!"
The many spat, and cursed, and fell away.
The few remained. I, too. An argument
Buzzed, buzzed within my skull that I could conquer
His flabby pule by reasonable wit.
I stayed, buy not my purse. The little bag
Which, of my largess, had fattened every night
Despite the paltry gleanings from the vulgar,
Now showed its proper leanness, which, because
Of those who had forsworn us, made its touch

As thin as its mere skin. The serving brothers
Grew meager, too, and, pinched to wrath by hunger,
Out of their dullard brains declared me thief.
I offered them the sack, but they denied me
This quick relief, smirked mock contrition, and
Complained among themselves. I stayed and watched.
This Jesus had the choice. He could recant
Of his pale sickly folly, and lead on
A righteous army to a righteous war,
Or, stung to stubbornness by crossed conceit,
Could claim as cornerstone that which had been
The bright-hued pebble of his poet's fancy.
Thrice cursèd Satan, who, with airy guile,
Seduced him to the weakness. On this day,
He might have been the lord of all this land,
And I,—

Samuel:

And you—

Judas:

What matter as to that?
There is no merit in a failed conjecture.
Here, here we are, and here we flit about,
Like lousy bats, like scampering things of night,
Like timorous mouslings,—showing, squeaking, running,
Chased by the priests, the targets of small boys,
The sheaths of Zealots' knives,—those cowardly thugs,—
Whose murderous hands strike where there's no defense—

Isaac:

Take care!

Samuel: [*to Isaac*]

Take heed yourself!

Isaac:

I have no fear.

Samuel: [*to Isaac*]
You have an oath!
Isaac:
True. But I will not stand
And hear such rancid words poured in a stream
To foul the fiery lovers of our country,
Our God, our laws, our Church, our sacred standard,—
The hero Zadics:—patriots, soldiers, men!
Judas: [*to Isaac*]
You are—
Samuel:
He is my son.
Judas:
If I had known—
Samuel: [*menacing*]
What do you know you did not know before?
Judas: [*after a pause*]
Naught.
Samuel:
Right! But all this marvelous adventure
Gives me no satisfaction of your outrage.
You wander.What of the harlot whom I chased?
Judas:
She is of the following.
Isaac:
A happy choice
Of new religion,—where kind ladies gather.
I 've seen that tall one. She is luscious.
Samuel:
Son!
Isaac:
Forgive me, father.
Samuel: [*to Judas*]
Well?
Judas:
She ofttimes bears
The urgent word to call us to assembly.

Samuel: [*eagerly*]
And 't was for this she came today? To bid you
To meet this Jesus?
Judas:
Yea.
Isaac:
And the honored place—
Judas:
Is where it is. Our warren shifts.
Samuel:
This day—
Judas:
It is where I 've been told.
Samuel:
Then tell it us.
Judas:
What reason?
Samuel: [*winningly*]
We are your kinsmen. Why, then,
Not share the morsel of your knowledge with us?
Woo back our trust by giving us your own.
Judas:
In all things, but this one. But as to this,—
I am dumb.
Samuel:
Speak out!
Judas:
I 'll not!
Samuel:
Then, by the God
Whose name your paltry vagrant dares blaspheme,
You shall not taint this honorable house
With breath or tread. Go now! Go to your bastard!
Go! Go!

[Pushes JUDAS, and makes sign to ISAAC to follow him, which JUDAS, struggling, observes. He wrenches himself free. ESTHER opens door slightly and listens]

Judas:

I 'll not dispute your elder's rights;
But there is no conviction in mere force.
I saw you sign to him to play the pointer.
I 'm no wild ass to circle for your sport.
You wish to find our leader's hole tonight?
Why? Show me cause, and if your aim be honest,
I 'll tell you freely. But I 'll not be braved.
As to this hue of bastardy:—of that
A differing story may be heard and told.

Samuel:

As ever. When an unwed has conceived,
The stars must shift, and nature change her habits,
To sprout a palliative for the slip.
We 'll not debate of that. Go ask the brothers
And sisters of your braggart why they shrink
From him and all his antics, and give thanks
That he has left his native hut and hamlet.
Ask why they plead indulgence for his ravings,
By reason of his being loon, crazed, mad.
Go ask the man himself whence came to him
His Grecian mind, and Grecian thoughts, who holds
No single word of all the Grecian tongue.
Go whisper in his ear the name "Pandira,"
And mark his Grecian nostrils tense and twitch.
Go ask him why he frisks from feast to dance,
Whose lawless blood revolts from decent show . . . .
Whelped foreign to life's ordered, staid respect,
He claims from godhood what's denied his manhood.
We 'll not debate. Let 's fasten to our meat,
And chew on what concerns us. I have stood
In courtesy, and heard you wail your plaint,
Who knew its every note before you sang;
And I have marvelled at your doltishness,
Who, living in the brewhouse, did not trouble
To see what herbs the brewer picked, or boiled,

But taking his charged potions, gave all folk
To drink, nor heeded whom the venom killed.

Judas:

The venom? Killed?

Samuel:

I 've said. Let me say on.
I am no passioned boy. I am no youngling
Who dreams a beggar made a reigning King,
And mine own self his minister of state.
You say that Rome has let this Galilean
Preach to the multitude, and made no sign?
Yea,— true. We know it, we of the Sanhedrin,
Who 've watched this cross-raced wander through the land
To teach bowed meekness to our trodden people:
We who have made complaint to Roman power,
And heard Rome's legate sweetly answer: "No,—
"We see no evil in that man." No evil?
Yea, yea,—no evil to the foreign rule;
No evil to the publicans; no evil
To those who hold us in a hateful thrall.
Nor is this all. To gain the furry ears,
He makes a tribune of the curb and swill-pot,
Wherefrom he spatters muck and defamation
At every fair and honest patriot name.
There is a world of strangers to abuse,
And sturdy manhood covers up its own.
Not so this filth-sprayer: he bestinks his kin
To bring his noteless self some stinky notice.
"You liars and you hypocrites!" he shrieks,
"You worthless rich, you thieves and usurers!"
And so on with his cheap malignities:
The whining wails of all life's abject beaten,
Whose impotence spits malice at God's world.
Are there not love and laughter in our land?
Are there not sprightly girls, the twang of strings,

Blythe snaps of wit, warm friendships, manly
contests?
Why, then, this wretched "Woe!" and
"Woe!" and "Woe!"
We need man's cheer to hearten us to battle,
Not dull dolorous croakings from a tramp!
A Pharisee: a democrat, reformer,—
I am not poor, myself. Mine honest thrift
Has gained reward, by our Jehovah's favor.
I hire mine idle gold out, at a rental,
To borrowers who profit in their turn.
I hate who hates me, love where I am loved.
I take by legal force the things I want,
And I observe our pious rites and customs.
I wrest from life the happiness it owes me,
And take my pleasures with forehanded care.
In short, I am the average honest man,
Who lives in his born faith, conducts himself
According to the morals of his country,
Composes the ideal with the expedient,
Makes wholesome use of his acumen, gives
From his excess to charity, and does not
Take issue with his betters, or his times.
Well,—am I, then, a liar, usurer,
And hypocrite? I ask that twice. You answer!
Come, answer that!

Judas:

Why? Shall I make defense
Of that which I myself abhor?

Samuel:

"You liars!"
To dare such slanders against all our best,
So as to win the favor of the shiftless!

Judas:

But if the metal of his shafts were changed,
How mightily he could incite for us!
Rome does not stop him. I have told you that.

Samuel:

Rome does not stop him? Rome stands by and
cheers him!

And we, who love our country, stand by, too,
And weep red tears of anguish at the shame.
But you,—you son of Judah,—you hold faith,
The partner of this treason, and when questioned
By patriot men who seek to flush this squalor
From out our sacred city,—you cry "No! No!"
Shame! Shame, you craven son of honest loins!
Shame, scion of the chosen of Heaven's God!
Shame, bloodless offspring of a warrior race!
Shame, weakling, whose proud forbears bore aloft
The Lord of Host's own covenant and ark!
Shame, consort of the punks! What? Can you speak
And say I am unjust? Then tell me so;
But tell it me with reason, as you 've asked!

Judas:

I 'll turn him yet! He shall forsake his folly,
And serve the ends of our Jehovah's pledge!

Samuel:

You paltry scab! You pimple on a donkey!
You ladle in the service of a witch!
Near thirty centuries our faith has stood,
The bulwark of the world. Now, must it yield
To the free thought of this freak vagabond?
What? Are an atheist's pratings holy writ?
Messiah? He? The bearer of the Message
Will be as we of the Sanhedrin: pure,
Well-thought of men, well-stationed and well-mannered,
Strong, awe-inspiring, and,—the foremost:—pious!
We have no place for those of questioning faith.
Who is not blindly Jew, is renegade!
You puking of a carrion-filled crow!
It is by such as you our land is betrayed
To yoke, and chain, and foreign captor's whip!

Judas:

You lie, old man! I am no traitor,—I!

Isaac: [*seizes Judas*]
You dare! You dare!

Samuel:
Son: let the coward loose.
Let him go forth, still seemingly a man;
For, if you struck him, there would come from him
Not the quick spurt of manly blood; no,—but
The sickly, stinking ooze of graying slime.
[*to Judas*]
You 've heard me, Judas. We, God-fearing men
Of the Sanhedrin have decreed that he
You call your " leader " shall have meted out
The fate of all blasphemers. A reward
Goes to the upright man who brings him in.
Grace to our God, there are such. Lord, our Lord!
You awful King of heaven and of earth:—
Look down with pity on your servants' land,
And guide our hands to do your settled will!
We are all prostrate, Lord; we weep in woe.
Gone is the glory that was once the jewel
Of all the peoples and of all the faiths!
Gone is the glory, and your children lie
The wanton sport of hostile hands and arms.
Gone is the glory! Look on us, O Lord,
And bring it back to us! Light, light again
The high proud fires within the ashen breasts,
And let your flaming presence flash to lead
Your faithful sons to carnage of the foe! . . . .
[*to Judas*]
Away! Out of my house!
[Signs to ISAAC. ESTHER closes door]

Isaac: [*pushes Judas out*]
You shuffling craven!
Go to your whores, and bastards, and sleek spies!
[Exit JUDAS]
And now—?

Samuel:

Wait, follow: find the dove-cote! Then,
Stamp time to nothingness until you reach
The house of Annas. Tell him where. He 'll find
The how. For God, and country!

Isaac:

For God and flag!
And on this very night,—when we assemble
Within the secret council of the Zealots,—
Mayhap, mayhap, with this sedition quelled,—
This snaring traitor in the iron clutch,—
The chiefs may deem the moment blessed of heaven
To order that the cymbals call to war.
The call to war! O bless it, Lord of Hosts!

Samuel:

For God and country! Take this purse, my son,
And say I send it for the patriot fund!

[ISAAC takes purse, moves toward door. Enter ESTHER, running. Noise of many voices without, increasing in volume]

Esther:

They come! Lord Claudius and the other one!
A camel, too!

Samuel:

A camel?

Esther:

Yea,—'T is Claudius
And a camel,—nay,—the Roman, followed by
The captain and a burdened camel.

Samuel:

Posh!
Why bring a camel here? Is this a warehouse?
What is that howling, screaming?
[*to Esther*]
Hurry! See!

[Exit ESTHER. Noise ceases. Enter servant, closely followed by CLAUDIUS, MAGO. Their garments are in disarray]

Servant:

The Roman lord, my master, also he—

Claudius:

I shall announce myself. By Mars and Vulcan,
Your Jewish lambs have grown sharp teeth, my friend!

Samuel:

Has any of the rabble dared the splendor
Of yours,—a Roman presence? Sir,—

Claudius:

Forbear,
My loyal Jew. The quarrel was not ours.
We but intruded. Yet the cause was drawing.

Samuel:

And you espoused it? Ah, you generous Romans,—

Mago:

It was a lady—

Samuel:

So?

Mago:

A lady whom
We both have known in the more lightsome moments.
Your warming memory stirs you? As we neared
Your private lane, a man came from your garden
And joined her, waiting. Scarcely had they started
To brave the highway, when what was a shadow
Sprang into form. " 'T is she! Hi! Take her! Seize her! "
Trees, shrubs, stones, turned to men: foul-screeching clawing,
Intent to make her captive. He who 'd met her
Grew thin and vanished. Then, my lord and I
Gave battle for the lady. By Ashthoreth!

You should have seen the woman-baiters sprint!

[Holds out a fistful of hair; makes motion of tearing out a man's beard]

Here's grass I plucked from one thick louse-forest!
We brought the lady back. She leaves more safely
Out of your garden's little lower wicket.
Ask who's the lady?

Samuel:

Why, I ask it, then.

Mago:

'T was lithesome Mary! Yea, the Magdala:*
Our tender company of purple evenings!
Ah, master Samuel,—you recall her, now,—

Samuel:

Excuse my son, good sirs,—he has an errand—

[Motions to ISAAC]

Isaac:

Peace with you, sirs.

Claudius:

Our joint gods guard you.

Mago:

Peace.

[Exit ISAAC. SAMUEL claps his hands. Enter servants bearing trays with cups, fruit, etc. Exeunt servants]

Samuel:

The appointed rites of hospitality
Distinguish cultured man from savages.
So let me press my humble fare on you.

Claudius:

Your kindly words turn all these plates to gold,
While this mere earth-born food becomes ambrosia.

[Makes sign to MAGO]

* The version has been accepted, and used throughout the text, which makes the word "Magdala" mean "tall" or "towerlike."

Mago:

Good masters of fine dialogue:—a moment.
I have a treasure for you, Samuel, which
Weighs on my conscience, as an unpaid debt.
'T is in a chest upon a camel, yonder.
Please to relieve me of it with acquittance,
So I may hunt my pleasures, which take form
In thought of that same woman known as Mary,—
Our old-time Mary, brother Samuel, of whom
Oppressive rumors creep into mine ears.
For I have heard it said of our old playmate—

Samuel:

Come,—to the treasure,—
[*to Claudius*]
Take your leisure, sir.
We come back speedily.

Mago:

Quite quickly, sir.
By Sun and Moon and Earth! You are in haste!

[Exeunt SAMUEL, MAGO. After a short wait, CLAUDIUS moves about room, stopping before the doors]

Claudius:

You know I 'm here; and yet you keep me waiting.
Spendthrift of twice lost moments! Why, I saw you
Peeping o'er the railing of the roofing.
And then you vanished. Fluttering maid's conceit!
I know you stand behind some hidden cranny,
And laugh at me, because I am so eager,
And chide yourself because you keep me waiting.
Yet must you have your triumph of my troubling.
My beauteous moon, come! Move away the clouds,
And shine on me in pleasant, golden fullness.

O do not keep me waiting any more!
Come out! Come precious woman! Do not keep me
Still waiting .... What? Forgotten, then? Forgotten?
And do you laugh at me untearfully?
Forgotten? .... So soon? ....So, Claudius grows poor,
But will not be a beggar in good earnest,
Who took delight in begging for pretense.
Forgotten? Then farewell ....'T is night .... Farewell ....

[As he reaches the door leading outward, ESTHER appears. She wears garments more decorative than those she had on before]

Esther:

In haste, my lord?

Claudius:

My sweetest,—is it you?
A votive offering, Cyprian lady! Esther,—
'Tis you yourself? You radiant goddess! Tell me:
'Tis you yourself, and not some dreamy vision
I 've conjured of my longing? Let my lips
Feel your palms' softness, and the harder fingers,
That I may know your pulsing flesh is here.

[Falls on one knee]

Esther:

Nay, 't is not meet you, of the victors, should
Bend knee to me, the daughter of a race
That yields your conquest. Yet if you make question
Or of my quickness or my warmth, why, I
Must prove you both.

Claudius:

There's but one way to do it.

[Embraces her]

O that the passing time would end its movement,
And nature cease to be on this one kiss!

Esther:

You did not, then, forget me?

Claudius:

Can the flower
Forget the sun that drew its bud to birth?

Esther:

But, there are many beauteous girls in Rome,
And four long seasons have waxed full and withered
Since last you held me thus.

Claudius:

Nay, not four seasons,
But four long aeons, of which every day
Has been a century of slow dull hours.
If there be other maids for man's caresses,
Or other lips, or eyes, or woman's hair,
I saw them not. All that mine eyes envisaged
Was what I 'd left behind me on these shores,
And what, returning, I saw nearing me.
And you, my Esther?

Esther:

Some time,—long ago,—
O, can it be last hour—? my dry paps suckled
The crimsoned muzzles of every grief that God
Laid on frail woman for the primal sin.

Claudius:

And now—

Esther:

My Claudius . . . . Your arms have shriven me.
God's curse is vain. I 've won o 'er God's first curse!

[They embrace]

Claudius:

You rise a goddess o'er the swarm of gods!

[ESTHER disengages herself. Stands before separate tray of dishes, which she touches. Shakes her head. Sighs]

Esther:

Gods? .... Gods? .... Unclean .... A stranger,
—alien,—foe ....

Claudius:

You sigh, my love?

Esther:

For what must come. My reason
Is mistress of my passion. I know too well
That this delight foretells despair. I—I
Am of the Jewish stock. You are a Roman.
Can there be honor in our love? Can you,
Or all the world, bridge the abysmal space
That taunts us to a crossing,—you and me,—
Who are but man and maiden,—and who love?
My father's faith,—your birth,—our differing
bloods,—

Claudius:

I 'll force a bridge!

Esther:

And build it of whose honor?

[CLAUDIUS looks at ESTHER; evidences astonishment, makes a motion as if to answer, stops, stands silent. ESTHER approaches him; places her arms on his]

My chosen of all men: if I could think
That of my shame might bloom some pleasant
bond
To fold us in its sweetly odorous curves,
And twine us in a cleanly mutual life,
I would not stop to calculate, or weigh.
But what you know, I know. The yielding
woman
Yields up both love and honor with the last.
You,—a patrician,—will not take to wife,
And to your Roman home, a Jewish maid.
The bounds of race and creed, of mortal
pride,—
The bounds of country and the bounds of
Church,—

Bounds, bounds, bounds, bounds,—

[Stops. Gazes steadily into CLAUDIUS' eyes]

unless, O Claudius mine,—
You love me truly?

Claudius:

Or no woman's son
Has ever loved a woman.

Esther:

Then do this.
There is a man about, whom some call prophet,
And others,—otherwise. It has been rumored
He has strange powers. I know naught of this.
But, hearing of his comforting, and grieving
For you, I 've gone, through Judas' aid, and heard
The things he teaches. Do not ask my thought,
But go and hear him. Go and hear him speak.
Go do this, as you love me. Go this day.

Mago: [*outside*]

So there's your gold.

Claudius:

Where shall I go? Where shall I see you next?

Samuel: [*outside*]

It might as well have waited
Until the morrow, at the counting house.

Esther:

Today,—the leper Simon's house. Ask there.
Tomorrow, also there,—ninth hour,—we meet.
But wear a Jewish dress, lest we be noticed.

[Exit ESTHER. Enter SAMUEL, MAGO, and servants bearing chest, which they take to an inner room]

Mago:

My empty hands can clutch at pleasure's skirts.
Come, lord, will you make business, or delaying
The more important to a lesser hour,
Hunt joyance with me?

Claudius:

Where?

Mago:

Wherever be
The object of the riot of your will.
What say you, Samuel?

Samuel:

Travellers freshly landed
Demand that earth be footing for a frolic.
Until tomorrow, lord, and you, my friend.

Claudius:

Peace be with you.

Mago:

And recollections.

Samuel:

Peace.

[Exeunt CLAUDIUS, MAGO. SAMUEL closes the outer door carefully, stands for a moment, lost in thought, walks over to table set with cups, etc., puts some of the food in his mouth, starts, spits it out, sputters, runs to water receptacle, rinses his mouth]

Unclean! Good food and wine, unclean and wasted:
Fit but for dogs, or unbelieving servants.
" Peace to you, lord." " Lord " here, " lord " there, " Lord! Lord! "
Idolatrous, thrice cursèd foreigners! . . . .
The Magdala . . . . What has she told them here? . . . .
These women vent themselves in talk, talk, talk.
They will abort a dozen wobbling falsehoods
To prop one lie with parentage and rank . . . .
" Tonight," said Isaac. Yea, the call will sound,
As sounds the wind before the striding storm.
The throw of battle! Spears and swords will flash,

And clouting clubs will brother swishing darts!
The unclean blood will steam up to the nostrils
Of great Jehovah! We will tread the eagles
Of strutting Rome, as man treads on a worm!
Jerusalem, freed of her slothful softness,
Will rise again, the glory of the world!
You God of Abraham, stern Lord of Hosts:
Deliver to us this, our foe, and yours! . . . .
Forget not what I 've given for your cause . . . .
Stay . . . . stay . . . . This swooping war will mean much want,
And little to supply it. There will be
A need for sacrificial cattle, too,
That pious parents may give up in offering
For warrior sons contending in the field.

[Claps his hands. Enter servant. Samuel writes on parchment]

" To Daniel, son of Asher, at the Temple:—
" Buy cheaply, not above the current price,
" Ten thousand cattle fit for altar use,
" Ten thousand more for meat, and twenty thousand
" Full bushels of fat corn, all for receipt
" A six-month hence. Take none but solid sellers."

[Gives parchment to servant. Takes coins out of wallet, considers them, selects one, which he gives to servant]

[*to servant*]
To Daniel, at the Temple, and be certain
To drop this coin in the great box for alms.
Nay, wait,—I 'll give away mine alms myself.

[Takes back the coin. Exit servant]

I thank you, God of Strength, for all your glories
That have been. See! They come! They come again!
Your kingdom rises on the tearing wind-blasts,
High on the lightning's flash, and thunder's roll!

To arms! Your warriors march in proud alignment!
Soon, soon, they' ll bathe the plains' bright green with red.
To arms! Your faithful soldiers strike to people
The quiet valleys with your foe's new dead!
For God, for country and for flag! Hail slaughter!
To arms! Lord God of Hosts: bless, bless our arms!

Curtain

ACT II.

A room in the house of Simon the leper.

[The curtain discloses PETER, CLAUDIUS and MAGO in conversation. MARTHA comes and goes doing various household tasks]

Claudius:

He blows the boundary lines aside, you say,
As winds blow off some noxious smell? The thought
Has had its many thinkers in the past.
But none has dared to live it. And he holds
That love will conquer evil?

Peter:

He proves it;
And that all force is bred of Hell, for Hell.

Mago:

Bah! Have we not our chattels to retain,
Our slaves to hold, our women to defend?
And then,—there 's business. Surely,—there is business?
Can this be done by love? The man's an oaf!
Can you move ships without an oar or sail?
Or pull a plow without a man, or ox?
Can you,—can you do anything but as
The world has always done it? Eh? Tell that!

Claudius:

Indeed, indeed. We all must have and hold . . . .
And yet, in some far corner of my breast,
A something stirs to say a something else,
Which I can not quite hear. There's that which hints
A simpler way to compass life than by
Sly trick, the cut of sword, the blow of sledge.

Mago:

How else?

Claudius:

I do not know. Or, at the least,
I do not understand. I heard a Greek
Say, once: effects make causes.

Mago:

Which means—

Claudius:

Strange things.
The Greeks love words, which often smother thoughts;
But there 's a thought in this that rides the words.
I seem to see, with some unlighted vision,
A picture that makes pitifully small
The giant statures of our common aims.
A dream—

Mago:

A dream—

Claudius:

A baffling, teasing dream;
Elusive as the mystery told to me
By a relator of the Buddhist system:
"There is a life, did we but know to live it,
"That is within us, but unused by us,
"Which, understood, abates all fleshly pain,
"Dissolves the fleshly urge, turns earth to aether,
"And frustrates death."
[*to Peter*]
You: do you understand this?

Peter:

The words are comely, but the sense escapes me.
Our leader could expound them to an image.

Claudius:

If we could chat with him,—your leader,—mayhap
It could be profitable to him, too?

Peter:

I 'll pray him, but with little heart. It seems
This is the bitter hour for his spirit.
I 'll ask when he's to come, and tell you, sirs.

[Exit Peter]

Mago:

All for two twinkling feet, a pair of lips,
Eyes, arms, and other well known usual parts
Of woman. To serve your instant pleasure,
And carry out your plan for private cooing,
I drove a camel to that Jew's abode,—
A drooling, swaying, humped, malicious camel,—
To bear him chests who should have come for them,
And to entice him to the outer yard.
So, well, I thought I 'd served your need, and that
You 'd snatch the maid, and flap a joyous flight.
But no. From passion to a prophet! Baal!
I 've followed you, unasking. Now I ask:
What sprite possesses you? Are you for joyance,
And love, and merriment, or is your sickness
To take the form of marriage? Will you hand
The fire and water to her at your door,
And make a Roman matron of the Jewess?

Claudius:

How tangled are the patterns of our lives!
What puzzling figures of no form; what shoots;
What knots; what intermingling curls and twists;
What sudden bindings with strange yarns and webs!
And always the unstableness of outline . . . .
Who knows what cast the spindle leaves the frame?

Mago:

Well mooned. But of this Jewess?

Claudius:

As for that,—
I came here sails and rudder set for marriage.
But now,—I am adrift. Some part of life
Took wing from me this morning, when, engaged
With Esther's lips, she freed them but to ask me
What I had brought to offer for herself.
I 'd come to seek her as an equal mate,
Integral with myself, whose natural faith
Would give her love as gives the trustful child
Its hand for guidance, stopping for no thought,
Assured that such as I would take no gift
From her bestowing hands, but to return it
With prideful plentitude, in heaping measure.
True love items no invoice, draws no bill,
Nor fingers thoughtfully the abacus . . . .
I was intent on marriage, till she named it;
But not as price for merchandise passed on.
Now, now, though craving her no less, I 'm minded
To bargain sparingly for what's for sale.
My dream of love has had a sour awaking.
Elysium is but a market-garden . . . .
There 's something aches in me where I 've been torn . . . .
That strolling poet's verses may bear solace.

[Enter PETER]

Peter:

If you are kindly minded and disposed, sirs,
I 'll give you this in trust, on your pledged honors.

Claudius:

My faith.

Mago:

My promise.

Peter:

In most muffled caution,
Come you at noon of night. The place is in
The garden of the wine press. He may speak

To those who tend his steps. I can not say . . . .
But, sir, before you go, I pray your name
And station in great Rome. 'T is in my mind
That some day I may go there to tell over
The wondrous things our Jesus has told us.
I hold the rabbi's keys from him. They are
The fair reward of all my diligence.

Claudius:

My name is Claudius. My stock patrician.
My wealth in quarries. When you come to Rome,
You 'll be my client. Would that he 'd come thither.
If he has artfulness, he 'd be a god.
In Rome, we always make them gods,—or corpses.
Kings, princes, heroes,—warriors of note,
Good healers, poets,—Rome creates them gods!
It knows the cheapness of mere men so well . . . .

Peter:

I 'd bring another thought to blazing Rome.

Claudius:

Yea,—come to Rome: it is religion's spawn-ground,
Where all gods prosper most amazingly;
Greek gods and Latin, gods of Mizraim,
Hard-visaged Babylonian gods, and gods
Of the Phoenicians, Northmen, Teutons, Gauls:
They merge on Father Tiber. We 'll wed your god
To all the others. Who shall say what issue
Will follow on the mating? What high shrines,
What incenses, what mysteries, what chants,
What splendid incantations, ceremonies,
Creeds, doctrines, vestments, jewelled signs?

Peter:

Your mocking
Is all unjust. We preach a simple thought,
And he who leads us says:—" Call no man
' Teacher,'

" Or ' Father,' nor be ye called ' Masters.' " So,
I pray you: mock me not.

Claudius:

Your anger 's worthy;
Your faith bespeaks you candid. I do not mock.
I am not flushed, but green. I sport to hide
The gnawing in me. Yet, I say: all gods
Must have high unction, like to Kings and wantons,
To hold their winning grace. The common human
Calls for a god of power, and of choice:
A god who takes fine gifts,—else who 'd be priest?
A god who 's bribable, and who inclines
A humoring ear to prayers, and changes all
The fixtures of high heaven to show favor
To a staunch champion of his own clan.
Such are successful gods. All others fail.

Peter:

You are astray. We teach the giving hand,
And not the taking.

Mago:

Then will you be loved
Of those who hunger, not of those who eat!

Peter:

Some day the world entire will hunger for
The food we offer! This I feel, and know!

Claudius:

There may be truth in that . . . . Sir: I am ashamed.
I crave forgiveness for my puny wit.
I 'll come to hear him justly on this night.
Is there some sign to pass your sentinels?

Peter:

Not yet. He says our sign is in the making.

[Exeunt CLAUDIUS, MAGO]

Perhaps I spoke too harshly to that Roman.
It is not well to spread about at large

The acrid odor of offense. He smiled
Most winningly on leaving. These soft-born
Are often gifted with delightful charm . . . .
I 'm hungry.

[Looks into cupboard]

Empty! Judas has not come . . . .
If he is taken . . . . Then there is no meal
This night. In Nazareth, there 's fish, there 's bread,
There 's kindly fire. I smell the frying now.
My wife bakes cakes. O Nazareth! My home!
I 'm sick for you! This city is a sewer:
A hostile sewer, filled with gnashing rats,
That leer, and sneer, and creep, and dart, and bite!
In Nazareth, the homely kin stroll out,
And tell their tales, or sing the night away . . . .
How pleasant was our path in Galilee,
Among our simple, cheerful, toiling folk:
Where sweet contentment waits on little need!

[Enter Esther]

Esther:

Peace to you, brother Peter.

Peter:

Peace, Esther. Whence,
And why this avid haste? Have all the hours
Of all your days turned into parts of seconds?

Esther:

I strove to be here first, before lord Claudius—

Peter:

You know him?

Esther:

'T was my insistence sent him here.
I saw him leave. Did he have word with him?

[Indicates the inner room]

Peter:

He is not here as yet. He comes toward sundown,
And Claudius will hear him in the night.

But there 's conspiracy in this. It is,
I shrewdly guess, of no unworthy nature?
This Roman—

Esther:

Sir: I love him.

Peter:

Most amazing!
A maiden loves a man!

Esther:

Love? Beggar word!
How thin, how bloodless, cold and unconcerned:-
To love! To wish, to long, to crave, to yearn! . . . .
The barren human tongue!

Peter:

And you would have him—

Esther:

Be mine through all eternity; I his.

Peter:

But was there not some pointed thought about
Of marriage 'twixt Jochanan and you, Esther?

Esther:

What then? He is my father's love, not mine.
I plight my body with my heart, or else
I do not plight at all. And Judas says
Jochanan woos my dower.

Peter:

I do not like
This Judas. He is a stranger in our band.

Esther:

But Jesus bids us all to love the stranger.

Peter:

True. Why do I surrender to this error?

Esther:

O Peter, ask him that he preach and argue
So Claudius will forget his Roman pride,
As I my race. Then we may spurn the bounds
Of tribe and faith, and being both reborn
Within the new confession, blend in one,
With Love our God, and all mankind our nation.

Peter:

Through carnal love to godly . . . . Well, may-
hap . . . .
I 'll urge it, though I have but little right,
Who left a wife and children of this earth,
To gain a higher home above the clouds . . . .
I 'll urge it for your softness, in my folly.
I 'll urge it . . . .

Esther:

Urge it strongly.

Peter:

Torrid youth,—
It plies a bloody goad: its whims great needs.

Esther:

There is, also, this. Perhaps I should not tell it.
My father. The Sanhedrin. I have heard
threats.
They hate, they loath the leader, and they
seek him
To take him quietly, and end him. So,
You 'll warn him of his peril, Peter?

Peter:

Warn?
Words squandered. Go warn Moriah of a
shower,
Or Jordan of the plying of an oar.

Esther:

He 'll not go north to safety? Why?

Peter:

Why? Why?
He 'll pare no trade with any, nor with aught.
He has his own philosophy of life,
And prudence has no part in it. He says:
" Shall I put by the cup my hands have filled?"
" There are those who must die to live . . . . "
At moments he looks sick of very life,
And even of his best elect,—of me . . . .

Esther:

If Claudius were to love him, you would have
A strong defender in the frantic hour.

Peter:

Well planned. I thank you, child. We need
strong patrons.
I 'll urge it.

[Enter MARY]

Mary:

Peace, brother!

Peter:

Peace. You are tardy.

Mary:

I was hunted.

Peter:

Hither?

Mary:

Oh, I pray not.
I coursed as does the fox.

Peter:

Who chased you?

Mary:

'T was—
Why,—it is you, sweet Esther?

Esther:

Yea, good sister.
Who chased you?

Mary:

Who but your brother Isaac?

Esther:

You lost him?

Mary:

Yea. I think so. Yea, I hope so.
But lest mischance o'ertake us, get you hence.
We, here, are better minded for encounters
Than you, dear child. Home! Home!

Esther:

But, if he comes here,
Perhaps my presence—

Mary:

Will but stoke his ire.
Hence, quickly!

Esther: [*to Peter*]
You will press it?

Peter:
Much, and more.

[Exit ESTHER]

Mary:
What 's on her mind?

Peter:
She has a Roman lover,
Whom she would lead to marriage through our gate.
She loves him.

Mary:
Ai! That old familiar word!
" I love you! O, I love you! Come, be mine!
" Your body: give it me to sate my love! "
The litany of passion. So men chant it,
With constant invocation: " Give, give, give! "
And woman,—woman whispers: " Take, take, take! "

Peter:
You have unlearned those words?

Mary:
Nay, learned them better.

Peter:
I 'll prove you liar by some various slaps—

Mary:
Slaps? Blows. Disgust. I am no longer fare
For panting men. I 've learned true love; his love.
'T is not the love possessive and requiring,
But wide, full serving love. If I could soften
My bone and gristle to a tender bedding
Wherewith to make the road soft to his feet,
So he might bruise me with his careless step!
If I could turn myself into a vapor,
To shield him from the hostile look and touch!
If— —Peter: you, a man, cannot contain

The meaning of our Jesus. Woman, only,
The child-bearer, can understand him wholly:
Can feel the anguish of his brooding yearning—

Peter:

But, Mary,—

Mary:

Finish!

[Sounds of many men approaching without]

Isaac: [*without*]

Jump, men, to your stations!
Guard here, and there! You six to storm the sty!
Come, Jochanan!

Jochanan: [*without*]

No names! Do not shout names!

Mary:

Isaac! He trailed me!

Peter:

What shall we do?

Mary:

Stand! Stand!
If he should come!

[Points to inner room]

Draw off their wrath to us!

[Shouts into opening of inner room]

John! Matthew! Run! Warn! Stop his coming here!

[Enter ISAAC, JOCHANAN, and others. They wear their headdresses so as to mask their features. Some carry clubs]

Isaac:

Salute your guests, you squeakers! Wish us well!

Peter:

What do you seek?

Isaac:

Why, you, my bully; also
Your chief commander,—suzerain of all whores,—
The long-haired lover of the gutter-wash,—

Zadics: [*without*]
Hi! Here come two of them! Halt! Ho! I have them!

Isaac: [*runs to outer door*]
You have him?

Zadic: [*without*]
Nay. Two maggots.

Jochanan:
Kick them off.

Isaac: [*to Peter*]
Where is he?
[Pause. Silence]
Where is he?
[Pause. Silence. ISAAC seizes PETER by the throat]
You lazy whiner!
Where is that Roman spy?
[Strikes PETER]
Speak!

1st Zadic:
Tear his guts out!

2nd Zadic:
Tear out his tongue!

Peter:
Why do you beat me, sir?
We have not harmed you. We have but come here
To bring to you our brotherly advice—

Isaac:
Hear that! They bring advice! From Galilee?
You impudent! Do we, of this great city,
Need to be taught as to our laws or ways
By strangers? by men from Galilee? Pah!
[Beats PETER]

Peter:
Why do you beat me? We have but said some words—

Isaac:

You rascal! Do you say you dare to speak,
But as our chiefs deem right? You infidel!
Damned outlander! You scorn Jerusalem's laws;
Then why come, slinking, on her sacred soil?

Peter:

Why, sir, I simply think—

Jochanan:

He thinks! Ai! Ai!
His father's faith is not good enough for him!
He is of the intelligent!

[Laughter by mob]

Isaac:

He thinks!
Here 's argument for your intelligence!

[Strikes PETER]

You anarch! Heretic! Where is this Jesus?

Jochanan: [*makes motion of drawing noose about neck*]
The one of you who 's here tomorrow—so—!

Peter:

What law—

Jochanan:

When decent men protect the State,
Their virtuous arms write law as they enforce it.
We speak for Order, and this is our Law!

[Strikes PETER. Others do likewise]

Mary: [*runs forward to shield Peter*]
Misgotten sons of apery! Is it
Your holy god whose arm beats through your fists?
The one you seek is not within your reach,
As he is not within your comprehension.

Isaac:

The Magdala!

Jochanan:

Ah! What a feast!

Mary:

If you
Must have flesh for your anvil, hammer this!

Isaac:

I 'd rather hammer you with love.

[Approaches Mary]

Mary:

You? Love?
You nauseous swine! Speak of your livid lust:
Your pious lust!

Jochanan:

She has blasphemed!

Zadics:

Blasphemer!

Jochanan:

Bring out your prophet!

A Zadic: [*drags forward Martha*]

Here 's another wench!

Isaac:

Seek! Ferret! Hunt!

Jochanan: [*seizes Mary*]

I 'll take you for your worth!

[Jochanan and Mary struggle. The Zadics shout and laugh. They beat Peter, break the furnishings, and tear down the hangings. Those without commence a chant that continues during the ensuing action, and in which some of those within join]

The ancient horn has sounded,
The ancient call floats high:
From sloth, from sleep,
We rise, we leap,
To fight, to win or die!

Though beaten down, surrounded,
Though shackled, yoked and bowed,
We draw the blade,
And, unafraid,
Redeem the vow we 've vowed!

Every stream a gory welter,
Every field an upturned grave,
Ply torch to pyre
For son and sire,
For foreign lord and knave!

Nor roof, nor wall, shall shelter
The enemies of God!
For flag, for land,
Brave hand to hand,
We 'll flail the conquering rod!

Jehovah, God of Battles,
Thou Lord of wrath and blood:
Look down and smile,
On stroke and guile!
Gaze on the crimson flood!

Here, where our war-drum rattles,
Here, where the brass alarms,
Turn thy proud eye
On us from high:
Bless our victorious arms!

Isaac:

The Magdala for me!

Jochanan:

I caught her first!
The laws of sport!

Isaac:

War's laws weigh on the land!
The sword is bared tonight! I 'm captain! Obey!
You take the other!

Mary: [*breaks away from Jochanan, throws her arms about Martha*]

Spare her, in God's name!

Isaac:

Our God protects his own. You are not of us!

[ISAAC and JOACHANAN drag MARY and MARTHA out, rear. Zadics leave, singing. PETER is on the floor. The CURTAIN descends, to mark the passage of a passage of time ; then rises. PETER is still on the floor. The door opens slowly. Enter JUDAS. He bears several packages, which he drops. He bends over PETER, examines him. Wets rag in bowl of water, applies it to PETER.]

Peter: [*feebly*]

A tender hand.

Judas:

Yea, Peter. See! I am
Like the Samaritan. I tend on you
Though you dislike me.

Peter:

Forgive me, brother—

Judas:

You have been punished. Let it be enough.

Peter:

It was—

Judas:

I know. I saw. I understand.
Those were the Zealots, and this wreckage is
The evidence of their unseemly anger.
I have it right?

Peter: [*rises*]

Yea, those were the protectors
Of Jahveh's holy law. Blood-lusting cowards
With hooded faces, fearful of God's light.
One of those pious took the Magdala.
Another pure one raped our sister Martha.

Judas:

He raped, you said?

Peter:

Raped.

Judas:

H'm. Well, and what then?

Peter:

In Law's and Order's names they left this message:
Who do not think as they think, go, or die.
Tomorrow we must leave Judea's soil.

Judas:

Or—

Peter:

Or be dragged away by haltered necks.

Judas:

They 'll do it, too . . . . With halters . . . . What an ending!
But there were two who left before these came.
I saw them as I watched, out on the highroad.
I followed, lost them, and have just returned.
Those first: one was a Roman?

Peter:

Yea.

Judas:

What bait
Drew such a Roman hither?

Peter: [*points to interior room*]

Is not he
Sufficient bait?

Judas:

To bring a Roman noble?
Your reason squeaks.

Peter:

Your tongue's unruly.

Judas:

But
My purse is kind. Eh, brother? Jump again.
Pull on your memory's latch. What brought the Roman?

Peter:

A private business.

Judas:

Yours?

Peter:

Yea,—nay,—the leader's.

Judas:

Yea,—nay. What crippled talk is this? Come, answer!
Who was this Roman? What was his business here?

Peter:

I 'll not be questioned so! I am your elder!

Judas:

So, there's a secret here? Friend Galilean,—
You have a secret which a mere Judean
May not share with you? Well—I am content.
A house of secrets is no house for me.
Here is the purse. Since I am so unworthy
That I may not be let into the tale
Of what 's to do, and what 's to guard,—farewell!

[Strides toward outer door]

Peter:

Stay! Anger flowers in unreason. It breeds
An acid poison, which makes melt the pith
Of equitable thought. Do not betray
Your wholesomeness to what this drench will bring.

Judas:

Enough! Am I to stand here like the scholar
Before his finger-waving teacher, and
In humbleness take swallows of reproof?
Am I to let you fill my drooping ears
With wagon-loads of parables? You,—you,—
Where did you gain your right to point and scold?
Was every fish you netted Solomon's?
And is your belly-wind a sigh from heaven?
I 'll know that Roman's business here, and if
You will not tell it,—why,—no,—I 'll not go,—
I 'll ask the prophet, in there, and discover
What 's in the shell behind that placid mask.

[Moves toward inner room. PETER steps in front of him]

Peter:

He is not here; knows nothing. I 'd have told you
The little tale, but that I feared for your—

[Hesitates]

Judas:

My—

Peter:

Prudence.

Judas:

Ah! The word you thought was honor.
And is my honor less than is your own?

Peter:

We Galileans know, one of the other,
What there 's to know. But you we do not know.
You are a stranger in the following.

Judas:

A stranger? So? I 'll make myself more known
To him who leads us to whate'er he leads us.

Peter:

Nay! Give him peace, if he has come. I 'll betray
The confidence. The Roman came to hear
Our Jesus' teaching at the prompting of
A maiden.

Judas:

Maidens, maidens! Sprinklings, showers,
Full floods of maidens. Why?

Peter:

She hopes our message
May soften him to honorable marriage.

Judas:

She is—

Peter:

A Jewess.

Judas:

Yea. Her name—

Peter:

Is secret.

Judas:

Her name?

Peter:

Forgotten.

Judas:

You are an awkward liar.
Your hasty invention balks on its first trial.
Devise another.

Peter:

What I 've told, I 've told.

Judas:

I could do better, on the instant. Now,
What was suspicion, rears an accusation.
You make conspiracies to which I—I—
The only stranger in this following—
Obtrude a hindrance. Well,—I 'll dig the truth
Out of that Galilean! I,—

[Moves toward inner room. PETER engages him]

Peter:

What black
And hornèd devil jerks in you? Are we
Concerned in some unlawful plot? O Judas:
Can you have lived with him these weeks and months,
And not have come to love him and to trust him?

Judas: [*shaken for an instant*]

I—Phut! I still have axe-hewn sense in me.

Peter:

Ah,—you have hatred, man. Think on the precept:
" The wage of hate is death! "

Judas:

Prate me no precepts!
You liar! " A maiden,—her name forgotten! "
Ha—ha! You skilless liar!

Peter:

What? I lie?
Well, then,—here is the story. Take it all.

The maiden is your kinswoman. She's Esther,
The merchant Samuel's daughter. Now, you crave
Forgiveness of me.

Judas:

Esther? Esther? Esther?
Our Esther? Say that name again. Say it!
Say it again!

Peter:

Surely, I might say it
A score of times, and make it naught the more.

Judas:

And through his teachings she's to wed a Roman?
Who is the Roman?

Peter:

He is a potent man:—
Patrician,—Claudius—

Judas:

I know that name.

Peter:

No evil?

Judas:

Evil? Nay, nay,—no evil.
So Claudius marries Esther by our help?
You great Jehovah! Tell me:—he is convinced,
This Roman?

Peter:

He is not yet. But on this night,
He comes to hear the splendid word. You know
The potence of his voice. Tomorrow,—ah,—
Tomorrow Claudius will be of us.

Judas:

Tomorrow Claudius will be of us;
And being of the conquerors, will have
His way. Tomorrow,—tonight,—tomorrow....
Where does our Jesus go this night, and when?

Peter:

He ponders in Gethsemane. Perhaps,
When night has balmed his spirit, he 'll speak to us.

[Enter MARY and MARTHA, through rear door. Their clothing is torn. MARTHA is weeping. MARY supports her. As MARY speaks, MARTHA goes into inner room]

Judas:

So, Mary. Evil fortune?

Mary:

Fortune? Yea,—
Hard, evil fortune , . . . Hear me, you Judean,
And you, my brother. Hear me, too, you Master
Of Hell, you raping, warring, conquering god:
There shall be price for this! There shall be price!

[Enter MAGO]

Mago:

Hail, Magdala! By Tanith! You are coy game!
I 've circled like some pup hunting its tail,
To find the ending lashed to the beginning.
I sought you at your bower—your olden bower,—
Your beauteous bower,—

Mary:

You find me here. In place
Of tender petals heaped to make a bed,
Whereon the city's choicest may make pleasure,
You find this driftwood of their frenzy. Yea,—
This is no pleasant place. There, no man dared
Play lecherous eye on me until a bargain
Had sealed our inclinations. I was the charge
Of all respectability. My nymphs
Were likewise. The puffing priests, the judges,
The heaven-gazing pillars of the Faith,
The cunning merchants and their husky sons:
They came to me in honorable shame,—
To me and mine. There was the proud, horse-faced,

And virtue-dripping judge, and chief of priests:
" Sweet madam,—I have heard you have a
Greek—"
A scribe of the Sanhedrin:—" There 's a
Nubian—? "
A pursy usurer:—" I am to meet
" The wife of—" yea, I knew her. She was wont
To pace sedately to the Temple gates,
With all her garments closely gathered. Such
Was my secure and guarded, hallowed state
As public pander. In my crimson robe,
I held the sceptre of that passioned queendom
All men deny, and all men serve . . . .
Come out of hiding, ancient crown of mine,
[Undoes her hair, which falls loose]
Adorn me, too, once more, my robe of state!
[Takes red robe from closet]
The emblems of her rank must serve, this night,
To win the Queen her passage where she goes!
[A noise is heard from one of the other rooms]

Peter:

Ha! What was that?
[Fearfully edges around behind MAGO. Enter MARTHA. She whispers to PETER]
He has come.
[MARTHA goes back to the room from which she has come. Sobs and murmurs are heard, which gradually die away. MARY hesitates, makes as if to follow MARTHA, shakes her head, puts on the red cloak, and starts outward]

[*to Mary*]

Stay, Mary!
In that cloak? You? Again? For shame!

Mary:

Shame? Shame?
Am I not justly garbed,—an unchaste woman,
A beastly thing made shameful by chaste men?
Pure, vice-despising champions of virtue,—
Sweet-smelling warriors,—lilies,—every one!

I have a fable of them I must tell
To Roma's legate. If I do not hurry,
I may forget it. Yea,—I may forget
The patriot captain, and the clarion call,
And what 's to do this night for the Jehovah,
And other things . . . .
[*chants*]
" Jehovah, God of Battles,
Thou Lord of wrath and blood!"

Peter:

Hold—

Mago:

Lady,—

Judas:

Stop! You shall not go! You shall not!

Mary:

You 'll bar my way, perhaps?

Judas:

'T is barred. By me.
First, foremost, before all, we, here, are Jews.
Whatever be our quarrels in our household,
We settle in our household.

Mary:

Yea. We settle.
They 've settled it with Martha.

Judas:

As to that—

Mary:

That! That! Yea, as to that!

Judas:

I 'll lay complaint—

Mary:

Before the judges?

Judas:

Yea—

Mary:

You are no fool,—
You,—Judas. Nay, I know you for your craft.
So 't is the rogue in you that speaks? Am I

To kneel to wolves for justice on a wolf?
First, foremost, before all, we, here, are humans!
I 'll fight the bloody god with blood! Make way!

Judas:

You stay!

Mary:

Ho! Here 's another patriot!
Go hood your face, and buy a little flag!
With bludgeon in one hand, and in the other,
A purse for your great god, to win his priest,
Go out and murder those who please you not!
Go strangle those who dare think not your way!
A patriot! A Zealot!

[Tries to pass by JUDAS. He stops her]

Make me way!

Judas:

You 'll not reach Rome!

[Engages with MARY. MAGO grapples with JUDAS; throws him]

Mago:

The lady reaches where
Her whim commends her.

Peter:

Mary! Mary!

Mary:

Pah!
I 'm sick of men's voices!

[Exeunt MARY, PETER, MAGO, arguing]

[*without*] Force and force for force!
Rome! Roman strength for Jewish!

Judas:

Rome! We and Rome!
'T is done! The sorry cast is thrown. The end!
I hate you! O, I hate you, and I hate you!
We 're marriage-brokers at the last, and serve
To bring the Jew and Gentile to one bed?
Self-blinded fool! Soft, pliant instrument
For that bland, doe-eyed, woman-winning knave,

Who strikes to grasp rewards for his own self
By playing factor to the Romans. I,—
I am a stranger among these. So, so—
A stranger, eh? A stranger, stinking fish-men?
A stranger, hucksters of cheap blasphemy?
A stranger? And shall I endure? Nay! Nay!
I will not see my people's warrior blood
Turned to the droppings of a festering sore!
I will not stay an outcast of my race:
A thing disgusting to the patriot soul....
My land! My faith! Or right, or wrong: mine own!
Jehovah! Take your son back to your bosom!
He brings his sacrifice to make atonement!
Blood! Bubbling blood, such as the serving priest
Pours down the sacred well on the high altar!
For God, for country and for flag! Sound drums!
Let Jordan roll a wallow of strange gore!
I bring you blood, O Lord of Hosts, blood, blood,—
Hot, steaming, hissing sacrificial blood!

Curtain.

ACT III

The Garden of the Wine-Press, at night.

[At the curtain, the sound of a shepherd's pipe is heard]

Claudius:

The air is magic with a dulcet charm.
There 's mystery about, and in the stillness
That lightly presses on the field and hill,
A thousand untold tales float to the ear,
As from some tongueless tellers. Enchantment . . . .
The mellow witchery of restful night
Smooths all the troubled senses, as the brush
Of some fine silken cloth wove on no woof.
It is a night for flitting presences,
For dreams, and sobs of unexpressed content.
It is a night for love . . . . Love, passion, lust:
What 's the true word?

Mago:

The very last for me.
It is most accurate,—and shames the moonings
Of lying youths who ditty for deceit.

Claudius:

I had thought otherwise. But if love be
But the allurement of a sexual trade,
Why, then, it is but lust, and I shall snatch
Its amber fruit when I can bend the bough.
Tomorrow is the harvest day.

Mago:

Good speed.
Soft! Stoop! Some come!

[They step aside. Several figures pass]

Claudius:

That Jesus must be there.
We 'll stay behind. I do not relish closeness

With those who go to him. There are some odors
That do not tickle me to pleasure. Hush!

The Voice:

Woe unto you, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.
Woe unto you, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.
Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.
Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger.
Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.
Woe unto you also, ye men of law! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.

[Murmur of voices]

If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee*:

[Murmur of voices]

Claudius:

That man speaks earnestly. To dare tell truth
In any priestly land!

---

*In the original manuscript, the gospel passages were combined and paraphrased. It was then decided to replace the verse forms with biblical text, but the former are given here.

The Voice:

Woe to you, hypocrites, who take for spoil
Whatever offers to your clutch, and make
Pretense to piety by prayer!

Woe to you, hypocrites, whose alms are blazoned,
Whose steps are ordered for a public show,
Whose private lives are foul!

Woe to you who pretend to outer bloom,
But who send forth the vileness of your hearts,
Which is your true defilement!

Woe to you who make bargains with the conscience,
And keep the part offending for its use:
So do you pledge with hell!

Mago:

Morals! Morals! Pests
To send your neighbor, but poor things to house.

Claudius:

That man is very earnest.

The Voice:

When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret:
But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do.

[Murmur of voices]

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

[Murmur of voices]

Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that agreeth with me hath everlasting life.
And whosoever liveth in agreement with me shall never die.*

Claudius:

There is a certainty within his speech.

Mago:

Why, he would starve the priests!

Claudius:

He speaks again.

The Voice:

From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders.

[Murmur of voices]

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*Verse form :—
The Voice:

Pray in no temple, nor with words, nor where
You may be seen of men, nor by repeating:
Commune with God in secret.

Think not to shrive your soul by word, or rite,
Or incantation or profession. No,—
Your whole life moves the scales.

They that take the sword shall perish with the sword.*

Claudius:

That man has spirit. There's a daimon there
Which is not of the Jewish heaven. I've heard
The same conceit in other lands.

Mago:

Dreams, dreams,
For quiet fields, and moments of unwill.

The Voice:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another;
For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.
But love ye the stranger.
These things I command you, that ye love one another.**

Claudius:

There's something in me stirs to tears.

Mago:

The night,
And the sweet smell of jasmine in the air,

---

*Verse form :—
The Voice:

From hate springs hate; from force more force; from guile
Still greater guile; who cheats, but cheats himself:
The earthly gain is loss.

**Verse form :—

I give you this commandment: that you love.
Love not for love received, but of yourselves:
Such is the eternal love.

The one commandment: love, and do no ill.
Think of no evil: let no evil course
In blood, or in your heart.

The one commandment: love because of love,
And when offended, pay the tale in love.
That way lies the true life.

My one commandment: when you love, you live.
But, when you do not love, you die, you die:
The full, eternal death.

The Voice:

This is my commandment, That ye love one another.*

A Woman: [*without*]

Rabboni! Tell me! Where, where is God's kingdom?

The Voice:

Behold, the kingdom of God is within you!

[Sound of marching. Enter SAMUEL with armed men; some bear torches]

Samuel:

I 'll see it done myself. A worthy deed
Sheds honor on its doers. Listen, you!

[Draws close to him two men]

When we have seized him, we will lay our march
Across the Kedron bridge. You two make shift
To jostle him into the stream: deep in.
By that we 'll cheat great Pilate of his power
To make our judgment die in execution.

Guard:

But if he do not drink into his lungs?

Samuel:

Why, then he sought escape, and was retaken.

Guard:

What wit!

Samuel:

Here are some coins.

Guard:

Your servant, sir.

[Enter JUDAS]

Judas:

There,—there he sits, like some soft, feathered pigeon,
And coos the joy of gentle, prayerful love.
Men made to women; hard arms turned to putty;

---

*Verse form :—
The Voice:

My last commandment: there 's no God but love:
And love alone will bring you life with God:
When loving, you are of God.

The will to conquer made the will to serve.
O, I 'm impatient of the laggard moments!
Let me lay hand on that unsexly thing,
And make his loose flesh feel a true man's grip!
" The wage of hate is death." Yea,—but whose death?

Samuel:

Come, Judas, to the business!

[Exeunt SAMUEL, JUDAS, guards, etc.]

Claudius:

I am unsettled . . . . Which of them is right?
That tender bard, or this hard mob? My mind
Is as the swirling of a sudden gust
Which sweeps the road-earth to unaiming quarrel.
I am unsettled. Something in me moved,
At his last words, as moves the solid sea,
When pushed to tidal-flow. And now,—and now—

Mago:

You are too fond of pondering abstrusely.
It is not healthful.

Claudius:

I am so compelled.
You know, I 've often wondered, friend, whether
Our lives are subjects of fixed, charted courses,
Or the mere tossings of unordered drift?

Mago:

They go to take him. Come, let us foil the Jews!
I do not like them.

Claudius:

Ah,—you seek the sport
Of battling for the battle.

Mago:

Why,—perhaps.

Claudius:

Too late. He is forsaken by his own.
This is a Jewish quarrel, for the Jews.

Rome leaves the priestly squabbles to their peoples.
But I 'll court Pilate for him in the morning.

The Voice:

I am he.

[Sound of a blow]

Samuel: [*without*]

Do you love me?

The Voice:

And sorrow for you.
Samuel, Samuel, what of your son Isaac?

Samuel: [*without*]

Gag me that traitor's mouth! How dare you utter
Respectable and honest names? You! Bind him!

A Zadic: [*without*]

He is a gentle creature, is he not?

[Sound of a blow]

Ho! Ho! Strike back, you, there, with long, soft hair!
What? Speak! Are you a man, or a mere girl,
Arrayed in husband's garb?

[Sound of a blow]

You poor soft nothing!
You are an insult to the stalwart male!
By Abraham's God, feel that! Ho! Does it hurt?

[Sound of a blow]

The Voice:

It is your eye that hurts me: it is evil.
The ray of what's your soul offends me greatly.
Look not at me.

Samuel: [*without*]

Come, braves! To foot! Away!

[Sound of men moving off]

Claudius:

Friend,—I am most unsettled.

Curtain

ACT IV — SCENE ONE

An antechamber to the meeting-room of the Sanhedrin.

[The curtain reveals a number of judges of various classes assembling for the preliminary examination of witnesses]

Jochanan:

He-he! so ends the tale. He chose the part
Of being cuckold, to save his honor
In the market.

Eleazar:

And you—

Jochanan:

I am discreet.
I take what serves me in a seemly manner.

Doras:

I am more drawn by Sarah, the fair-haired,—
Her widowed sister.

Eleazar:

Ah, you 've had her, too?

Doras:

Why not?

Eleazar:

I had thought—

[Samuel approaches Jochanan's group]

Doras:

Ho! Here is humor!
Our friend had thought to find himself a virgin
In Sarah of the golden locks!

All:

Ha-ha!

Jochanan:

Pshaw! Even Samuel, here,—

Samuel:

Why " even," pray?
Am I the less a man for some white hairs?

Jochanan:

You older fellows! We are put to shame,—
We youngsters,—by your piracies of maidens.
Caiaphas dallies, tarries, lingers. Night sinks.

[Enter a guard with scroll, which he presents to JOCHANAN, who reads it]

Caiaphas writes: by Pilate's sudden order
He's held to give his seal to some state warrant
That touches on the Roman rule. Wherefore,
He begs that we examine witnesses
Without him. He will join in the great sitting.

Eleazar:

These Romans! Night or day, we serve their whims.

Samuel:

More caution!

Jochanan:

Yea, caution; but it chafes me.
Come, who 'll be chief of council?

Eleazar:

Let it be
The oldest: Samuel.

[SAMUEL ascends the däis. The general conversation ceases]

Samuel:

As you say, I serve.
Most honorables: our distasteful business
Must move with swift precision, so the hours
May not betray us to an irreligious,
Unworthy desecration of the Sabbath,
Before the sentence has its execution.
The witnesses. The first?

An Attendant:

There is, without,
The woman Martha.

Samuel:

Fetch her.

Attendant [*opens door*]

Martha, here!

[MARTHA is pushed in]

Samuel:

Your name is Martha: You are of the household
Wherein this Nazarene, named Jesus, lives?

Martha:

Why am I questioned?

Samuel:

To give your knowledge
To this, our honorable court, about
That shifty rogue, blasphemer and seducer—

Martha:

Seducer? Yea,—I have a true complaint
But not for mere seduction,—nay—for forcing
My body.

The judges:

Good! Good! We have it! The scoundrel!

Samuel:

Poor daughter of our people: let your woe
Fall on our ears, which bend to take the strain.
Whatever power lies in us to punish
Is as it were in your own hands to wield.
Our ancient court knows no more high concern
Than for the chasteness of our womanhood.
The law shall shout for you when you 've but whispered.
Speak trustfully. When? Where? And who was witness?

Martha:

There 's none as witness but of our own mates,—
Who,—if they speak—

Samuel:

They 'll speak, if every word
Be drawn out from their bellies with hot tongs!

Martha:

But will you give them faith?

Samuel:

The law says two
Shall be sufficient witnesses. We serve
As has been written. Accuse!

Martha:

I accuse
The man who on this very day, within
Our fold-walls, pressed my shrinking, struggling body
To his desire.

Samuel:

Woe to you, stricken land,
Where womanhood may suffer from such crime!
Woe to you! Rise, you stones, beneath our feet,
And of your own will bruise the guilty flesh
Until the cursèd blood boils under you!
Come, woman: speak you on! His name! His name!

Several judges:

His name! His name!

Martha:

You know him well.

Several judges:

Speak it!

Martha:

I force my lips to utter the vile word.
There! There! The Zadic, Jochanan,—he who,
The while another took the Magdala,—
Forced me—

Jochanan:

You liar! Liar! Liar! What!
Am I to sit and hear this further,—I,
Your brother in these seats? If you, good Samuel,
Have no respect for me, or for us all,—

Martha:

I am no liar! Well you know it,—you!
I 'll call my witnesses!

Jochanan:

You common punk!
You wayside filth! You—

Samuel:

Enough! We gave you ear,
Unworthy woman, in the pious hope

That you, repentant of your sinful life,
Would seek for grace by true confession. But,
Presuming on our hearts' concern, you 've used
Our kindness to a low, unkind abuse.
You 've sought to smirch an honorable man,
One of our honorable company,
A man who, by his true and useful life,
Has risen to the dignity of office.
His stature is above you, as the sun
Is far above the stink-weed.

Martha:

But I swear—

Samuel:

Swear on no more. The evil of you swears
More loudly than your oath.

Martha:

My witnesses—

Samuel:

Will make the air offensive, as yourself.
We are not gathered here for calumnies
Against the honorables of our people.
[*to guard*]
Remove the wench. Bring in another witness.

[Martha is led outward, struggling. When she is half way out, Jochanan rises]

Jochanan:

Apply your force more reasonably, guard.
The female is—a woman.

Samuel:

Tender heart!

Martha:

You smirking, hellish thing! O God in heaven!
Are you asleep, or are you not at all?

Samuel: [*thunders*]

Throw the blasphemer out! Out! Throw her out!

[Martha is dragged out]

Jochanan:

Alas, my brothers, I am but old fashioned.
I am not of the questioning, tilting kind,

Who challenge God's own word, or sacred texts.
I am not of the sparkling, but the usual:
The mild respectable who make our Nation.
I like to feel my dear old father's God
Is mine own God; my mother's faith my faith,
And their observances the ones I cherish.
For which I am the butt of the depraved.

[The judges murmur sympathy. JOCHANAN whispers to Samuel]

Samuel:

Call in one David, son of Saul; also
The donkey-driver Aaron, son of Booz.

[Exit guard]

[*to Jochanan*]
Their minds are fertile?

Jochanan:

As the thrice-plowed earth;
And warm for any seed.

Samuel:

The shoots will tell.

[Enter guard, DAVID, AARON]

Jochanan:

You loyal ones: give ear and understanding.

Samuel:

It has been told us that you two are men
Of honorable line, and honest worth.

David:

I have that trust.

Aaron:

None dare say other, sir.

Samuel:

You know the warning given to a witness?

David:

I, for myself.

Aaron:

And I.

Samuel:

And neither of you
Would challenge the Eternal's awful wrath
By bearing witness falsely?

[David and Aaron gaze, each at the other, puzzled. Jochanan leans over, tugs Samuel's robe, tries to whisper to him. Samuel shakes him off, impatiently]

Jochanan:

Answer, both!

Aaron:

Not I.

David:

Nor I.

Samuel:

I knew it by your faces,
Whereon the light of candor shines as clearly
As does the orb of day when in its mid-course.
Thrice blessèd mothers of whose wombs you grew!
Thrice blessèd you, who, if the good Jochanan,
Our brother here, has not spewed his first lie,
Are in a state to serve our God and Nation
With testimony in the sacred chamber
Against the shameless, base-born spy, seducer:
The Nazarene, this Jesus, son of Mary.

[Movement among the judges. Some spit. Enter Judas through door leading to the great chamber. Laughter and jeering heard as he opens and closes the door. Judas evidences perturbation. During the action following, he moves several times as if to speak, but visibly restrains himself]

Jochanan:

But not of Joseph, ha-ha, not of Joseph!

[Laughter, which is cut short by Samuel's gesture]

Samuel:

The balance trembles to a human life
Which, howsoe'er unworthy, still is God's.

We, Jews, are sons of charity and mercy.
Let wit retreat: our duty makes us solemn.
[*to David and Aaron*]
You may not testify unless you say
You know this culprit beyond doubt's least shade.
So listen, both: 't is true that there 's great need
Of worthy witnesses, like you, to prove
His sacrilegious crimes. 'T is true our country
Cries for the service. Yea, 't is true that those
Who bring this aiding gift will be among
The chanted, loved and honored of our people.
Yet do I say: before you may be heard,
You must aver you know this shameful man.
Come,—quickly,—do you say you know him?

David:

Yea, even as I know—my purse.

Aaron:

And I.

Samuel:

God of our fathers: bless these loyal men!
'T is said that on a recent day, you two,
While both in company, heard this vile creature
Speak an undoubted blasphemy. Consider:
If you were not together when you heard it,
You can not both say, word for word, its substance,—
You can not serve your God and land. Your talk
Must stay unheard. Consult, you, then, together,
And say: when, where, and who was there to hear?

[The witnesses consult]

Aaron [*aside, to David*]

We 'll say it was a month ago?

David: [*aside, to Aaron*]

Nay, nay!
Three months I 've been a cave-dweller,—a lifter

Of travellers' wallets. Captured yesterday,
I was brought in, a prisoner, at sunset,
By this Jochanan's men.

Aaron: [*aside, to David*]
I am shaken.

David: [*aside, to Aaron*]
The holy service calls for words. Jochanan
Said we 'd be guided by the pious ones.

Aaron: [*aside, to David*]
If any should impeach us—

David: [*aside, to Aaron*]
Laws and courts
Lose ears, and limbs, and will, when faced by those
Who serve the wielders of the law. Chase fear!
Pick fortune's pocket with a word, and thrive!

[Jochanan plucks Samuel's cloak, tries to whisper to him. Samuel shakes him off impatiently]

Jochanan:
They are o'erwhelmed with instances. Were they
To tell them all, the sun would thrice have raced
Its way about the earth, and they be telling.
I know it.

David:
You 've rolled and read me.

Aaron:
I can talk
Until your patience frays.

Samuel:
Your warm concern
Does honor to your thoughtfulness. I 'll prod you.
But I must give you warning: of my words,
Not one must lodge within your thoughts, to fall
From your unguarded tongues, lest it may be
That of my certainty of that man's sayings,

And of the places where he makes harangues,
I should, by miscast chance, name word, or spot,
That was not in your prior knowledge.

David:

Yea, sir.

Samuel:

Say, then,—you two so worthy and so blest,
On whose breath hangs the welfare of your land:—
Did you, by any venture, when together,
In the east passage of our holy Temple,
On any day of this week—first, or second,—

[Pauses, looks inquiringly at DAVID and AARON, who gaze, each at the other, uncertainly]

Jochanan:

Did you not tell me 't was the third late hour
On the fourth day of the last week?

David:

The same!

[AARON nods his head vigorously]

Samuel:

You heard this Jesus, son of Mary, say:—
"I 'll pull this Temple down, and, in three days,
"I 'll build it up again." Did you hear that?

David:

Those words!

Aaron:

Those very words!

David:

There, at that time!

Samuel:

And did you on that day, and in that place,
Hear him make boast: "I am the son of God!"?

Aaron:

The very words!

David:

Unchanged!

[The judges evidence horror. One takes a knife from his girdle, and carefully makes a small cut in his cloak, exclaiming *"Woe! I rend my garments!"*]

Samuel:

'T is well, my brothers.
And did you hear him say that all rich men
Must surely scorch in hell?

David:

I did!

Aaron:

They cheered that!

Eleazar:

The rotten agitator! Why hear more?
I 've heard enough. Let's go and vote him death!

Samuel: [*waves aside the interruption, and continues, evenly*]

And that all things were for the poor and humble,
Who 'd be exalted, and the great made low?

David:

The very words!

Aaron:

Yea, yea!

Samuel:

And did you hear
This dastard say the Law,—our sacred Law,—
Was now no more; and bid all leave their own
To follow him?

Aaron:

The anarchist said that!

David:

I heard him! O, how that villain hates the Law!

Jochanan: [*fervently*]

He 'd turn our dear chaste girls to common stews!

Samuel: [*suppresses the interruption with gesture of annoyance*]
And that the acts and matters we esteem
Are vile abominations before God?

David: [*spits*]
The spiteful radical said that!

Aaron:
And worse!

Brazenly!

Samuel:
Then are you both good witnesses.
The favor of Jehovah rests on you.

[JOCHANAN plucks SAMUEL'S robe, whispers to him. SAMUEL frowns, evidences consideration]

Now this: when you are in the judgment chamber,
It may be someone of those sitting there,
In zeal to guard the rights of the accused,—
As is but fair,—will question you to say:
How looked the culprit? What's his eyeball's hue?
His hair,—brown, red or black? His cheek,—his nose,—
How formed,—what length his beard,—and so on further.
For which I do adjure you: when you pass
Within that door, gaze carefully on him
Whom two armed men hold prisoner. Look him close.
If he be not the man you saw and heard,
Confess it freely:—it is not then given
To you to save your country and your faith;
But if you two are certain he 's the man,—
Declare it stoutly, though all hell assail!

[JOCHANAN whispers to SAMUEL, who shakes his head, negatively. JOCHANAN persists. SAMUEL makes gesture of assent]

One other thing. You are too poorly garbed,—
You honest fellows. Good wine deserves good jars,
And loyal bodies, honorable cover.

[Writes on a parchment, which he hands to David]

Take you this order to the treasurer,
And with its fruit make trade for what you need
To stand unshamed before the open court.

[Motions to guard, who escorts DAVID and AARON to great chamber. The judges start to converse, making gestures of admiration toward SAMUEL. JUDAS advances]

Judas: [*to Samuel*]
'T is done.

Samuel: [*glances at Judas, lowers his eyes*]
'T is done.

Judas:
My bowels cried at what
My head commanded.

Samuel:
God will pay you well.

[Rubs together two fingers and thumb of right hand]

You've touched palms with Helcias?

Judas:
The treasurer?
Yea....Yea....I have it.

[Shows purse]

Samuel:
Money! The world's manure!
Put it away.

Judas [*points toward great chamber*]
They stipple him with blows.

Samuel:
He wafts them kisses in return. How droll!

Judas:
I wish they did not beat him so....He 's gentle....

Samuel:

You mean,—you mean,—

Judas:

A moment since, sir, Daniel,
The son of Asher, held my sleeve. He whispered
The buying itch has spread so fast, this night,
Among the greatest of our gentle folk,—
Caiaphas, Annas, and these gathered here,—
And all for future sending,—that th' ungodly
Who own had lost their every proper sense.
The prices soar, as soars the smoke on air.

Samuel:

These holders lack fair conscience. . . . Shameless men. . . .
But why engage you on it?

Judas:

Daniel knows
I 'm of your household.

[SAMUEL frowns, shakes his head, then walks briskly to where the other judges are chatting]

Samuel:

Brethren, this is Judas,—
Judas of Kerioth,—a patriot,
Who tore the sinews of that sorcerer's mesh,
And brought him to the toils.

[The judges look at JUDAS curiously, but coldly, then resume conversation among themselves]

Judas: [*to Samuel*]

I have your leave
To call your roof my home again? There is
An admonition for our Esther, too—

Samuel:

My baby girl. . . . I was too rigorous with her. . . .
I 'll buy some bauble for her, or a shawl,
To soothe the hurt. What dazzles youth's round eye
Undoes its memory.

Judas:

Your house, and Esther, I—

Samuel: [*after pause*]
I 'll give it thought.

Judas:

You say—

Samuel:

I 'll give it thought.

Judas:

Meantime—

Samuel:

Be not insistent. I 'll think of it.
And I would rather you did not name Esther.

[Starts to pass by. Stops. Points backward with thumb toward great chamber]

O,—Judas,—saw you any miracles?

[Walks away, and joins in conversation with the other judges, some of whom laugh]

Jochanan: [*claps Samuel on back*]
The favor of Jehovah guides your tongue.

Samuel:

God's service sometimes calls for shift and trick.

Jochanan:

Which hearty piety will not refuse.

[Judas walks over to the group of judges, motions to SAMUEL, who makes gesture of annoyance, and steps aside with JUDAS]

Samuel:

We had finished.

Judas:

There is a matter, yet.
This Nazarene. Would not mere banishment
Serve every end, and keep us clean of blood?

Samuel:

I read you. That purse was given you for blood.
Well,—would you cheat the treasury? No more!

[Shakes off JUDAS' hold, and steps back to the group of judges. JUDAS starts to walk off. JOCHANAN is in his way. The latter draws his robes about him, and makes gesture of repugnance as JUDAS passes him. JUDAS stands, for a moment, uncertain, passes his hands over his eyes. One of the judges opens door leading to great chamber. Sounds of slaps, blows, shouts: "*Ai, ai, you lady-man!*"]

Judas: [*unsteadily*]

I have a word for you, you honorables....
A word, or more perhaps....'T is well you loathe me.
I am the mirror that gives back, your vileness.
Yea: in my mask you see your utmost shame!
Woe! Dreadful sight! I have been blind, and see!
You sworn foreswearers! Lords of perjury!
You liars! Liars! Less than grublings! Lice!
Take back your god: his filthy manual signs!

[Throws the purse on the floor]

"The wage of hate is death!" My wage, and yours!
I am what you are! Hell should burn us all!

[Exit JUDAS. Tumult among the judges]

Jochanan: [*walks toward where the purse is lying*]

The cur backs to his vomit.

Samuel:

That eases
My mind of an o'erhanging hard debate.

[JOCHANAN edges over to where the purse lies, and pushes it with his foot toward a place of concealment. One of the other judges observes him; walks toward him. JOCHANAN is confused for a moment]

Jochanan:

Caiaphas holds us.

[JOCHANAN wraps his hand in a fold of his garment, lifts the purse with it and, accompanied by the other judge, exits through door to great chamber, holding the purse out at arm's length. Other judges nod approval]

This for the treasurer.

Eleazar:

When Rome says " Halt! " the sun itself must stop.

[A noise of scuffling is heard outside]

Mary: [*without*]

Scatter! Scatter, scum! I am the Magdala!

[The outer door bursts open. Enter MARY]

So, you deny to Martha justice, do you?
Deny her hearing, eh? And bid her body
Be hefted out as you 'd a sack of meal?
Which of you dared it, tell me? You,—you,—you—

Samuel:

Good woman—

Mary:

End that chant! I will not hear
That whine of the superior playing grace!
Be silent, you: the first and very last!
You 'll hear the Magdala in red, God curse you!
You 'll hear me!

Samuel:

Our charity will shield you a short depth;
But not beyond quick bailing!

Mary:

I 'll shield myself. Now,—you,—you glorious judges,—

You honor of the Nation,—choicest pickings
From all the plants of El! *Kedeshim! Nethinim!**

[Murmur of protest by the judges, etc.]

Samuel:

You loose-tongued woman!
[*to guards*]
Rid us of that foulness!

[Guards advance on MARY]

Mary:

Rome knows I 'm here; and I 'm a Roman's wanton!
Which one of you will violate that charm?

[Guards fall back. MARY advances nearer the judges]

My foulness, eh? Well, then, who made me foul?
I 'll tell you . . . . yea: I 'll tell your very god,
If so it be he does not know. Come, now,
You most respectable,—you solemn pillars
Who hold the structure of the sacred State:
Come, gaze at me unblinkingly, you blinkers!
Recall the day you laid your accusation
Against me, when our Jesus shielded me?
He bid the one of you without the sin
To cast the first condemning stone; and then
He bent him down, and wrote in the loose sand.
Do you recall the things he wrote? The names
Of those of you accusing, and, beside,
Your pairs among the women of your kind!
I 'll speak them, if you will, you grunting swine,

---

* At this period undoubtedly the most offensive terms of opprobrium. The prohibition of the bringing in of the gains of male prostitution, as well as of female prostitution, as appointed income of the Temple of Jehovah, in Deuteronomy, XXIII : 18, is taken by some students to indicate that the practice was prevalent at a prior time. This becomes significant if the conclusion reached by modern critics is accepted that Deuteronomy is a comparatively late work,—of the seventh century B. C. The male prostitutes of the Temple (*Kedeshim*) are directly mentioned as late as Josiah (approximately 620 B. C.).
The *Nethinim* present the curious, but not unusual, spectacle of the members of a once honored, or, at least, distinguished, caste becoming reduced to the lowest state of pariahship. Undoubtedly the offspring of the "sacred" Temple prostitutes of old, they were originally appointed to serve under the Levites within the "holy" precincts, and were free from payment of all tolls. But, as the religious reformations urged by the prophets (or poets) went on, the civil state of these acolytes sank to the point of obscenity.

Who make the judgment of the innocent.
You whores of soul: who knows you better than
The whores of flesh? If all the bawdy-beds
Were let to speak at once, then history
Would cease to lie, and people cease to bow!
Come, you, my Moses, have you, yet, a memory
Of little Mira, pretty wife of Nahum,
Whom you were wont to hold in my south chamber?

[Exit one of the judges, making gesture of protest]

And you, my Eleazar, tell me: how
Do I know of the marking near your navel?

[Exit Eleazar, in same fashion as the one before]

You, Obed: when you had the private sickness
The Greek girl gave you in Tiberias,—
Do you recall your prayer to me for herbs?

[Exit another judge, in same fashion as the one before]

And you,—

[All the other judges go out, protesting, except Samuel, whom Mary holds by his cloak]

Samuel:

Take off your touch!

Mary:

You loved it once,
And paid for it with gauds, which you had bought
To grace your wife.

Samuel:

That madness is forgotten.

Mary:

But not by me. Their recollections are
The prized possessions of the public women.
You paid for my warm favors; but your son,
Your Isaac, was more thrifty: on this day,
He took them all for nothing.

Samuel:

Liar! Harlot!

Mary:

The last, but not the first. Now, hear me out.
I plead, I pray to you, my Samuel! See:
I kneel to you, and beg you; and for what?
For Martha? Nay, she 's but a woman wronged.
Is it for myself? No, no! I would not kneel
For that. I kneel and pray to you for him
Whom you, and others like you, go to judge
Within there. Show him mercy.

Samuel:

Jehovah
Has said those who blaspheme shall die. He dies.

Mary:

The law says many things. What 's one man's justice
Is oft the other's crime. Do not cry law,
But as the means of mercy. Think of mercy,
Who may yourself seek mercy in the hour.

Samuel:

The Lord of Hosts protects me. I but do
His graven will. All softness is for women,
And men whose veins are breasts that shed their milk.
The Law is written, and the Law will speak,
Blessed is the Law!

Mary:

You love your son, your Isaac?

Samuel:

Again my son?

Mary:

Again your son. Where is he?

Samuel:

He will not help you.

Mary:

Where is he?

Samuel:

In his place.

Mary:

Man! As you love him, spare the one in there!

Samuel:

Because I love mine own, I 'll see that smooth
Seducer of the common folk condemned!
The cunning of the law is wrapped about him
As is the python round the squealing hare.

Mary:

Samuel, Samuel, listen to me, hear me!
The balm of mercy is a tender juice,
That cures the hand of him who sprinkles it.

Samuel:

Prattle and rubbish! The world is to the strong!

[Starts to leave the chamber. After a moment's pause, MARY steps after him]

Mary:

Ah you are strong . . . . I like that . . . . You are strong . . . .
Gaze on me, Samuel: am I not beauteous?
Is there not something of my full flush ripeness
That 's worthy any male man's appetite?

Samuel:

What then?

[MARY is silent]

What then? What would you say?
You mean—

[MARY places herself close to SAMUEL]

Mary:

There lives no man who 's had of me the gift
Of all my body holds in privy tryst.
Gaze on the softness of my hard, round breasts;
Gaze on my curving arms; look in mine eyes:
Gaze!

Samuel:

I see—

Mary:

What do you see—

Samuel:

I dare not—

Mary:

But you shall more than dare, for I will give
Of my free motion what no man has bought,
And what your secret fancy has not known
To dream. You,—you alone shall feel the flood
Of such rich vintage from my trembling lips
As no dull mortal's taste has yet partaken.

Samuel:

I know it is within you.

[Reaches for her]

Mary:

I 'll pour it
In prodigal and sparkling stream. Look at me!
Feel what is to be had of me . . . .

Samuel:

I 'm drunk
On that which flows out from your eyes.

Mary:

Think, then,
Of that to come when you are wholly bathed
In the full ardor of my streaming passion.
What can the buyer of a woman know
Of all she has to give of her own bent?

Samuel:

I know. Once I was loved.

Mary:

You 'll swear you 've been
Unknown to love, when you have grasped my gift.
This is for you . . . .

Samuel:

For me . . . .

Mary:

And one small favor
Is all I ask. O, not as price,—but as
A mutual earnest.

Samuel:

Ask it. Ask it,—you!

Mary:

His life. His breath and blood. That Jesus' life.
No more. Not that it matters. 'T is a fancy.
'T will sadden me to think of him as dead.
So jail him; send him to the desert. Aye,—
Turn him a foolish, tottering thing; but see
The court does not make mouldering meat of him.

Samuel:

You love him, still?

Mary:

Love? Have I not just said
You are to have that treasure of my inwards,
In all your understanding of the word?
Nay,—'t is a token that I seek of you.
Have you the power to wrest it from those there?
Are you the man: the striding, conquering man?

Samuel:

Ha! Do you doubt it?

Mary:

Doubt it, Samuel—I?
Would I have offered to a milksop that
Which I have tendered you—or thrown my gage
To one of the mere ordinary?

Samuel:

True . . . .
It may be done . . . . And that is all you ask
For your own self—

Mary:

Except your sweet affection.
I have a weakness to be loved by one
Who is all strength,—and gentleness. You 'll be
Quite gentle with me in your strength?

Samuel:

Bewitched . . . .
I am bewitched by you. I feel the ashes
Of my young manhood stirring to new blaze.
I 'll work the miracle that he cannot.
He shall be free in exile: dead in living.

Mary:

A bargain, then?

Samuel:

A bargain.

Mary:

Fair. Now, I
Forgive your cruelties. And as for Isaac—

Samuel:

Isaac?

Mary:

I forgive him; and I shall undo—

Samuel:

I had forgotten. Make confession full.
The frightful tale you told of Isaac: that—
That was the spuming of your anger?

Mary:

Nay,—
'T was true . . . . But I forgive him.

Samuel:

True? True? God!
You mean—he—

Mary:

He did. But I forgive him.

Samuel:

You hideous woman! Now, you plan,—you plan—
That I, his father, I—you,—whom my son—
Slut! Vileness! Go to deepest hell's damnation!

[SAMUEL exits to judgment chamber. MARY falls to floor, sobbing]

Curtain

The intermission marks the passage of several hours. Before the second scene, the ceremonies of sunrise are heard. A mellow voice chants: "*There is light in Hebron.*" This is followed by a short blast on the horn, then by a longer blast, then by three rapid blasts. Repeated, growing fainter, and dying away.

ACT IV—SCENE TWO

The antechamber.

[The curtain discloses MARY listening at door. It opens, and DAVID and AARON come out. They wear rich cloaks over their old garments. They make gestures of mutual congratulation, and pass out. PETER staggers in]

Peter:

I dared deny him! Wretched that I am!
He looked at me but once, and with such pity,
Such kindly pity! Though all the years of time
Come on and pass away, my soul will still
Bear that dear loving image! I denied him!
Poor craven that I am! I denied him!

Mary:

They judge him?

Peter:

So they pretend. They mock him.
I waited for a miracle. None came.

[Burst of laughter within; sound of a blow. PETER makes gesture of horror, and exits]

A voice within:

Now prophesy, you prophet! Say who smashed you!
Again, Hobab, again! The other cheek!

[HOBAB, a guard, enters, holding his right arm with his left hand. He gazes at his right hand stupidly]

Hobab:

I could not do it twice! He seemed so quiet,
So sweet,—benign,—I would as lief have struck
My mother's wrinkled face.

[Runs out]

Other voices: [*within*]

Let me get to him! Slam the cur! See, see,
He 's white! His liver needs a flush of blood!
Ho! Jail-bird! What an ugly face he has!
"Love those who hate you! Love you the stranger!"
Seducer! Traitor! Spy! You anarchist!

A voice: [*within*]

Ho! Silence for the honorable court!

Voice of Caiaphas: [*within*]

Approach here, convict!

[Shuffling of feet; murmur of voices; imprecations]

Well, Jesus: apostate,
Heretic, free thinker, anarch, comrade
Of dirty women and of outcast men:
Your guilt is self-confessed: your challenges
Are but your fraud-born tricks, to cheat the Law.
Source of rebellion against State and Church:
The judgment is as written in the scrolls,
And made more terrible by Roman usage.
A shameful life shall end in shameful death.
Death .... First be scourged,—then,—walk you with the cross!

[Cries of approbation. Enter SAMUEL]

Samuel:

That 's through! Praise be to Jahveh, our Lord God!
The witnesses conformed with all the writings.
Caiaphas is a judge,—truly a judge,—
A strong, majestic figure of high will!
How gloriously he towered above that felon:
A sword-girt angel o'er a cringing gnome!

Mary:

Samuel,—hear me,—pray for him! Mercy for him!

Samuel:

Still yowling, harlot? Well,—your coddling dies!

Go back to your old business! Off with you!
This is the purple moment of my years:
The zenith of mine honor and good works!

[Enter, from side-chamber, two guards, armed, escorting Isaac, chained. Samuel stares at them, stupefied. Isaac makes sign of silence]

Samuel:

My son!

[Tries to approach Isaac, but is prevented by guards, who start to march out. He throws himself in their way]

My Isaac! By what sign and warrant?

[Guard shows Samuel parchment]

Caiaphas—sent to Pilate for the death!
For high conspiracies against the Roman rule!
So, that's what kept you, Caiaphas! Dog! You dog!
You servile dog!

Isaac:

Father!

Samuel:

This reads your death!

[Isaac bows his head. Enter guards with Jochanan, who struggles]

Jochanan:

I am no traitor! I 'm a peaceful subject
Of Rome and Cæsar! Help! I will not die!
I am a loyal subject!

[Points to Isaac]

The scheme was his!
I 'll tell it all to Pilate! Take me to him!

[Chief of guards shows disgust. Makes sign, at which Jochanan is gagged, and dragged out. Mary approaches Isaac]

Mary: [*to Isaac*]

Tell him to pray for mercy for the other,

[Points to judgment chamber]

And I 'll go pray for you.

Samuel:

Off, wretched punk!

[Exeunt ISAAC, guards]

To Pilate, Pilate, Pilate! To arouse
The worthiest of the worthy! I shall pray
Before Rome's power on my floor-spread face!
I 'll quench his molten ire in pools of tears!
I 'll make his heart to bleed though it be brass!
My son! My son for prayer! Soul's guard! My son!

[Exit SAMUEL. MARY pushes open the door to council chamber, listens]

Voice of Caiaphas: [*within*]

On with the scourging! Come, the whips!

[Laughter, jeers, swishing of whip and sound of its landing on body. As the scourging proceeds, Mary moans, then cries, and finally shrieks to every lash]

Curtain

ACT V.

Roof of the house of Simon the Leper.

[The Curtain discloses MARY, clad in white, gazing outward; PETER rocks in grief]

Peter:

The shame of shame! The pitiful surrender
To the gray taste of fear! To have denied
The love of him who loved me! To have stood
Within the chamber of his torture, untouched,
And there have cried him stranger! To what hole
Shall I address my whine for covering?
The titmouse will defend her vent to me;
The lepers will shrink from me, as a thing
Uncleaner, far, than they,—and justly. O,
That I had torn you, tongue, from your abutments,
You lips, that you had rotted and sloughed off,
And that my throat had shrunk and dried and withered,
Before I spoke the lying, lying words!
The lie of fear! The rapid, cringing lie!
The slithering lie of the dissembling coward!
The ewe will fight the eagle for her young,
The mother dove will rear against the kite,
But I, a man, denied him,—and then fled!
Shame is me! . . . .

[The scene begins to darken. Enter JUDAS. He is seen by PETER]

You! You! You dare the darkening vault above us,
The eyes of us? You dare,—you dare,—you seller,—

Mary: [*turns*]
You loyal patriot! Pure citizen!
Why at such distance from the goodly show?
How? Glutted? Sated? With so little gore?
Four spurts....I saw them come....They held him so.
Two soldiers. Murderers for pay, obedience.
They held him so. A third one poised a nail,
Applied its sharpness to the piteous flesh,
Here, in mid-palm,—raised mallet,—struck! The blood
Screamed as it leapt. I asked the stolid Thing:
"Why do you drive so savagely?" He answered:
"Because I 'm bidden." Proudly....Said it proudly!
He hammered. Jesus looked at him, and wept.

Judas:
Man crucifying man....'T is good for business.
'T is good for priests' and Kings' and rich men's business.

Peter:
You spawn of Tophet! Falseness! Vileness! Off!

Judas:
'T is not for you to stretch th' accusing finger,
Nor to invoke the angry word of blame.
Whatever it was I did, was done for reason,
In calculation for a proper cause.
I did not, like the rabbit, in a panic,
Scoot, chattering, at the sound of a strange voice.
Nor have I lied for fear. O, I recall you:
"What? I? Good sirs,—I do not know the man,
"And never knew him." Shivering poltroon!

Peter:
Swine of a traitor! Name me no bad names!

Judas:
I 'll name you what I please, you wretched slinker!
I have the courage for the curse on me.

Peter:

The curse? He cursed you?

Judas:

Not in words, but thus:
He gave to me the gift of vision. Yea,—
He gave it me most suddenly, unprayed.
So I,—I who was blind, as you, and as
Mankind in total, lost the sweet affliction.
I saw the tale that 's told by human faces,
And by their eyes. O scarifying cure!
I saw again what I had seen unseeing,—
And wondered he had deigned us worth his smile.
" For God, for country and for flag." What god?
What country? And what flag? And why? . . . .
To lift one set of liars o'er another?
To change these rogues for those? To raise new Kings
Of perjury and pillage for the old?
And, for such small obscenities, to waste,
To burn, to rape, to kill! He cursed me well
With this barbed curse of sight!

Peter:

He cursed no man!

Judas:

Ah—ah! My jackal starts his little yelp!
And from now on, you, who denied him living,
Will bay him dead! Yea, I can hear you now:
" Thus said our Jesus; " " such was his best wish."
Yea, I can hear you. And your pauper wit
Will strive for years to tell in seas of words
What he declared in syllables. But never,—
You 'll never shape it properly, good Peter,—
Because you 've never quite known what he meant.
How could you? How could any of us, wranglers
For place and office?

Peter: [*snarls at the gibe, then, wistfully*]

Had I the gift of language!

Judas:

Out yonder, he is dying; I still live.
But to what end, or to what joy? I 've seen
The dreadful truth of life. My blood has sung
To exultation, triumph and revenge;
It stills in querulous, dull discontent.
A fierce imperial purpose roweled me;
I stopped. 'T was but the prickle of mine own sweat.
I claimed a debt. I took my satisfaction.
'T is in my hand. But gaze: my hand is empty.
I went to the great chamber, so he 'd see me,
And waited for his fierce, red, angry eye.
Had he but spoken once:—had he but shot
At me the shaft of choler; had he struck
With one hard, baleful glance,—I had been held
To my vindictive strength, and not the turning
Of every rearing head in all Judea
Had touched my sense, or stirred me to unrest.
But there was nothing in him more than pity,
And a forgivingness that spread about
Like the last breath of some sweet, fragrant rose,
Crushed by a cruel hand to bleeding pulp. . . .
I 've seen man naked, stark. I 've seen the mighty
Loll on their lofty seats and play pretense;
I 've seen the inner ark of the great pious,
The machinations of the guardians,
The motions of the rulers in their closets,
The lie of law, the seams of form and line.
I 've seen the ribald cheapness of high state,
And,—O most horrible: I 've seen myself;
A sight no man may be vouchsafed, and live.
So, I am sick. Yea, I am deathly sick!
I have a rank disfavor in me, which
Moves me to retching at the very sight
Of any human face. The world is a lie!
He, only he, was honest, truthful, kind.

Peter:

'T is so I see him, too: unreasoning kind!

Judas:

Be still! Your prattle halts my thought. The things
I did, were done out of an ordered mind,
But badly bargained. I was rich in treasure,
Of which my mind's approval of myself
Was first. But then I craved men's good opinion.
I traded .... A lustrous gem for dung .... And then,
My dreams: my angel's wings, on which I soared
At will to the empyrean .... Ha! I must be
As other men: the practical, successful.
I must be within custom, habit, folkways,—
Within the chalk-lines drawn by imbeciles,—
Within the dribbling rulings of the instant,—
Unknown to yesterday, jeered by tomorrow.
And so, in shame of my celestial gifts,
I threw them in a sink-hole. Yea, I changed
From near to godship to a cow,—a pig,—
A grubbing, guzzling unit of the herd.
I do not like myself....
I gave my true wealth
For country, flag and God; for our Jehovah,
The jealous god....Well then: now, being bankrupt,
I may be careless, too....Hi! let me be
Disordered....My wage: I must collect my wage.
The wage of hate....I am going off to play
An eager, swinging game. Hi, Peter, Peter,—
I'm off to dance,—will you come with me Peter?

Peter:

You horror! O you horror!

Judas:

The brave, alone,
May fling this step. 'T is not a tread for cowards.

'T is not for you, my Peter. I shall leap
This whirling dance; and when 't is done,—
why,—why,—
Then I shall sleep, like any tired child.
Perchance, in that fast sleep, I 'll dream him
smiling,
Who now writhes, bleeding, on that cross . . . .
Perchance . . . .
Who knows what dreams may come,—after a
dance?

[Exit JUDAS]

Peter:

I 'll go some place that 's nearer. It may be
I 'll pass unnoticed to Golgotha's edge.

Mary:

Go. Live or perish. What matters it?

[Exit PETER]

He dies,
Yet insects dart in play. Pale watery worms
Dig through the earth. A myriad idle folk
Stroll carelessly about. Cats, growling dogs,
Staid, paunchèd merchants, donkeys, love-
sick maids,
Gay, singing larks:—they live, and live, and
live.
But he—he dies! Jehovah peers and laughs,—
Jehovah, Lord of Hosts, the jealous god!

[Sounds of many voices, angry shouts, striking of stones below]

Mago: [*below*]

So, there's for you! You'll never cure that
headache!
In with you, friends!

[Sounds of closing door; shouts, striking of stones, etc. Through opening appear PETER, CLAUDIUS, the latter with head of spear sticking out of his body, and MAGO, carrying ESTHER, who is wounded]

Mary: [*runs to Esther*]

My little sister!

Mago: [*lays Esther down*]
So, gently.
Claudius:
Esther!
Meat of my body, breath of my nostrils!
Mary:
How was it done?
Claudius:
'T was the appointed hour.
I 'd been detained by Pilate. He had stood
As man, but as a politician yielded
To slavering priests protecting their high god.
She met me at the turning. We were near
To gaining shelter here, when Peter came,
Pursued by patriots. He called to us.
My dress proclaimed me Jew for Jewish sport.
We answered. We joined front. Sticks, stones, clubs, spears.
[Touches spear-head sticking out of him]
Mago: [*points to spear-head*]
How deep?
Claudius:
Down to the very throbbing source.
There, that which ripped the breach serves as the dam.
My covering body was not wide enough
To shield the child. See: here is where the stone
Thrown by a pious one cracked the thin shell.
O Esther, Esther, love and life, come back!
Come back to me, sweet wife, come back to me,—
My sweetheart,—wife—
Esther:
I heard you call me wife.
Say that dear name again.
Claudius:
A thousand times;
And yet a thousand times a thousand times!
Wife of my love: what's there but love that lives?

What's there but love worth living? Esther!
Wife!

[Kisses her]

Esther:

Your wife....My Claudius....Husband....
Love....Farewell....

[Dies]

Mary: [*bends over Esther's body*]

O pitiful!

[Shakes her fists upward]

Are you not shamed, you devil?
Do you not weep? Ah, no. You sneer in triumph....

Claudius:

I 'd been made foul by dank, foul thoughts about me.
I 'd harbored plans dishonest of you, dear.
That was because I did not rightly love you.
Alas,—we did not love. We but desired.
But now, I love. I love, and ache to give.
We beg to give when there is none to receive....
You useless, stupid world! You snarling manhood!
You petty strangulation that is custom!
I will not live with you! The Nazarene
Who dies so slowly on that felon's cross,
Has the true spark! I 'll wait for you, you Jesus,
With Esther's hand in mine, to tell you truly
What has been shown me, suddenly, this hour!
Out of the gossamer of our lightest thoughts
Is woven the ever-tightened cable of Fate
That drags us to our self-appointed doom!
[*to Mago*]
Bear good report of me, if so you feel it.

[Plucks out the spear-head, throws it down to street]

My gage! My greetings! Esther! Esther!
Wife!

[Dies. Yell from street. Pounding on door below]

Voices: [*below*]

Traitors! Blasphemers! Spies! Renegades! Kill them!

Miracles! Ha-ha-ha-ha! Miracles!

Mago:

Farewell, lord Claudius. I had held hopes
Of happier days with you, in Rome. Farewell.
I 'll bear your good report. I loved you, boy.

[Increasing sound of blows on door. Some sing "*Jehovah, God of Battles.*"]

I 'll need some weapons to hold off that riffraff.
[*to Peter*]
Say, you! Speak! Are there arms within the house?

[PETER shakes his head]

Why, then, I 'll go to search for makings of them.

[Runs down into house]

Mary: [*gazes outward*]

Have you not tortured him enough, Jehovah?
Let him,—let him die!

[MAGO reappears, bearing body of JUDAS, with rope dangling from his neck. Cries from below of "*Archers! Send up archers!*"]

Mago:

Faugh! Here is hard fruit!
He hung, there, still unbent, limbs lightly poised. . . .
Go, lovely thing! Go greet your lovely fellows!
A gift!

[Throws body over. Several bricks fall from top of balustrade. Yells, shrieks of horror and of pain from below]

The house is melting.

[An arrow flies by and sticks in flooring of roof; another; sound of door below breaking. MAGO closes door leading down, and motions to PETER to help him hold it. PETER joins him. Another flight of arrows; one penetrates MAGO's breast]

Ho! Hit!

Peter:

Not mortal?

Mago:

Yea. I feel the icy thrill
That every man knows once. . . . I need a god
To bribe for safe conveyance to some hell.
I do not like my Baal today. I 've learned
He is the second likeness of this El,—
The Jewish Jahveh. I like better yon
Poor fellow on the scaffolding. I think
He is a gentleman. Pah! Like Claudius,
I 'll line me with his course on the last water,
Where every man must wiggle his own helm . . . .
Ah, Claudius: who will bear your good report?
That I should die! I cannot yet believe it!
So suddenly! I cannot yet believe it!
To cease to be! I cannot yet believe it!
A sacrifice to piety! . . . . A moment,
And I shall be—what shall I be? Horror!
My glowing flesh turned into squirming maggots . . . .
You dreadful god, who wills that men shall slaughter,—
God of the strong: I bring you witnesses!
I, too, am strong! Witnesses!

[Runs toward the stone balustrade. Under the impact of MAGO'S body, the structure falls outward, upon the heads of those in the street. Darkness. Lightning. Thunder. Shrieks below, which die away to silence. As light comes back, the break in the wall discloses the three crosses in the distance. PETER has fallen on the flooring. MARY stands, gazing outward. The door downward opens. Enter SAMUEL]

Samuel:

You 've triumphed, Mary. Be you generous.
My Isaac. My first-born. Give me his life.

[As MARY stands silent, oblivious of his presence, he suddenly breaks, drops to his knees, shuffles to MARY'S side]

Mary,—good Magdala,—show mercy,—mercy!
See. I, who was so strong, am weak, and begging.
We crawled to Pilate. We implored. He answered:
" You love to lap red blood; learn, then, to leak it."
I 've sought you all the day. Your shortest word
Will save my Isaac. Speak it to the Romans!
I 'll give you half my wealth,—and more, and more!

[Touches her, tries to drag her by the hand]

Come quickly! Say it! I have sought you, sought you....

Mary:

See! See! There! He has died! He is limp. He is limp!
Jesus of Nazareth is dead!

[Peter half rises, gazes toward the crosses, and softly sobs]

Peter:

There came
No miracle.

Samuel:

My Isaac! They 'll believe
Your poorest word, who laid the accusation.

Mary:

O what an empty world! How vain all things!
How abject, mean and tawdry are all things!

Samuel:

My Isaac—

Mary:

What of Isaac?

Samuel:

Save him, you!
Have mercy on me! Mercy, Magdala!

Mary:

Yea,—I have mercy in my heart, and pity.
But that will not breathe life into the dead.

Samuel:

The dead?

Mary:

Your son died with the wane of morning.
The man-made law is swift when working vengeance.

Samuel:

Dead? Isaac dead? God of my fathers! Lord!
Why have you left me; me,—your servitor?

Mary:

Yea,—thus your bloody god of strength and guile.
He has taken other toll of you. Look there!

[Points to ESTHER's body, which is covered by that of CLAUDIUS. SAMUEL approaches fearfully, hesitates, moves away the corpse of CLAUDIUS, shrieks]

Samuel:

My daughter! O my little baby girl!
My little daughter! Murdered!

Mary:

By a stone
Cast by a pious man, in pious anger,
Obedient to the pious bloody law.

Samuel:

Whence—how—here—?

Mary:

She loved the Roman, and was loved.
They would have wed—

Samuel:

My Esther loved a Gentile?
My Esther? And this uncircumcized? Woe!
Woe! I am cursed! I curse! I—Oh, I can not!
I can not curse you, daughter....
I am tired.
I am an old, old man, and I am tired....
They loved, you say? In honor?

Mary:

Truly so.
He died for her,—to shield her.

Samuel:

Love....Love....Love....
The natural voice of all things sings it....
Love....

Mary:

Ha! What have you to do with love? Your Law!
Your Law of just reprisal, measured out!
The world is to the strong, and to the sly!
Scheme! Fight! Gain! Rule! So says the great god El!
Here is the fruitage of your worship, then:
Look! There is more of it, on that far cross!
And years on years, and thousands, thousands more,
While there be some like you to worship so,
Quick gore will gush, and human hearts will weep,
Because men live in force, and not in love!

Peter: [*to Mary*]

How came you by this sense, and by these words?

Mary: [*points to crosses*]

Gaze on that piteous sight....Words? What are words?
An ocean struggles at my throat, that would
Drown lands and peoples with its sweeping flood!

Samuel:

No, no, I will not curse you,—you, my babe,—
In that you loved without the pale of faith.
The faith....The faith in what? In what?....
There's something bores into me like an auger,
Which empties me....My veins grow dry and crackle....

Peter: [*places hand on Samuel's shoulder*]

Sir,—go you home.

Samuel:

Home? Home? I have no home.
My hearth is ice. My roof is desolation....
"The wage of hate is death!" 'T was Judas said that.
Repeat it not, you Judas!

Peter:

He is dead.

Samuel:

Dead? Why,—the dead are silent. Yet he spoke.
Was that my fancy?

Peter:

Who shall say?

Samuel:

He said
He feared to hate. Would I had feared to hate!

Mary: [*stretches her arms toward crosses*]
O Jesus, Jesus! Live again, again!

Samuel:

There is a voice deep in mine inner ear
That forces me in soft unfinished words:
Bold, startling words of unimagined sweetness.
What devil whispers?

Mary:

May it be an angel?

Samuel: [*to Peter*]
Sir: is my reason losing sovereignty?

Mary:

Or your unreason dying?

Samuel:

Jahveh! Jahveh!

Mary:

The cruel god!

Samuel:

Your draft is bitter, Jahveh!

Mary:

Man: would you press out honey from the adder?

[SAMUEL mourns over ESTHER. MARY turns to PETER, points to crosses]

Who 'll bear his good report?

Peter:

Why—why—'t will carry
Among the many.

Mary:

Who will be the one
To cry it out in pride close to all ears?
You, Peter?

Peter:

He is dead....

Mary:

Dead? Yea, to you,
To all vulgarity, to bloated flesh,
But not to the high firmament—or me!
He must not die! I will not have him dead!
That sunken eye must play on the blue air,
Those dear sweet lips that blacken,—they must move,
That tuneful voice must grow and swell to thunder,
Uncompromising, unconfined, unclipped,—
All here,—here where they hate him most!

Peter:

'T is death
To venture here. Perhaps in Galilee——

Mary:

Far better ten destroying Judases,
Than one denying Peter! O if I were male!
But I am woman: spoil Jehovah parcels
To his victorious soldiers, for their pleasure.
If I were male! I would not let him die:
Not now,—not any time,—he would not die:
If I were male!....If Peter were a male!

[PETER collapses. MARY resumes her position gazing outward]

Peter: [*stretches his arms toward crosses*]
Jesus! Shame 's me!
Samuel:
I do not know you, you
Who hang unmoving on that cross. But this
I feel: that you are victor,—I the vanquished.
I am a beggar at the gate of life.
I held myself a lush tree hung with fruit:
I am a lonely, blasted, barkless stump.
I fought the world for ownership and lordship,
Nor knew my every blow reached mine own heart.
Man coursing after happiness. . . . Ah me,—
A silly huntsman, whose quarry is himself.
My heir for prayer is dead. . . . For prayer? To whom?
To our Jehovah, God and Lord of Hosts?
Are you a god, Jehovah, or are you—
O,—O,—I dare not say it: yet I think it. . . .
Are you a god, or are you an ill thing,—
A bloody thing,—in godlike mask and form?
A father loves his children,—every one,—
The crooked with the straight, the frail the more
Because they are more frail: he 'll not incite
His son to war on son. Are you a god,
Who sets apart one people from another,
And blesses slaughtering arms? I can not think it,
When I dare think at all. . . .
I cast my seed
As you decreed, Jehovah. I 've reaped sorrow.
Has not the world reaped that of you all time?
Let me be honest with my conscience. Let me
Forget the fable,—reading what 's the fact.
I am not deaf! I am not deaf! I hear
Your silent laughter,—god of nudge and thrust,—
I hear your laughter. . . .
Why pray to you? For what? A god of blood,

Of sacrifice, and of a changing will;
A man-made god, to fit man's purposes....
The harvest of hatred.... Gaze at me, my dead;
And tell me of my sowing.... Hate breeds hate,
And victory in hate, defeat....To love,—
To love is life; to fail to love, is death.
To take is loss, to give is to receive.
He said it,—that scarecrow on the cross. And when
I taunted him, and struck his face, he sorrowed.
But not for his own self,—for me....
What, what
Is at the root of all these things?....The strength
That I was taught to worship,—is it life,
Or is it death?

Mary:

Behold its garnering!

Samuel:

I dare not look again! She was so kind,
So tender with all things,—like her dead mother.
Pray for her? I have no god to whom to pray,—
No sweet and loving god: mine is a god
Of sinister approach, of rule and force,
Whose every gift drips with reproachful tears....
I 'll lip no prayer, who have no prayer in heart.

Peter: [*firmly and loudly*]

So preached our Jesus!

Samuel: [*startled*]

Who are you, who speak?

Peter:

One without fear! I 've looked full at pale death,
And lo! It has no terror. Now I shout!
I prophesy! Hear me, all men! I tell
To whom will listen, and I 'll beat my speech
Into unwilling ears as with a stone!
A shrieking spirit strains in me! I 'm urged

To urging! Hear, all you who worship gods
Of form, and rite, and strife: you worship Hell!
All you who pray in posturings and words:
You pray to devils! I teach! I prophesy!
The earth will bathe in sorrow and despair,
In tears, and sobs, and blood and agony,
Until it spurns the fellowship of hate,—
Until it takes the fellowship of love!

Samuel:

So say you? Why, there may be sense in that.
I have lived the life of strength, and found it weakness,—
A horror of affliction and despair.
Mayhap I should adventure....
I need a god.
Man can not live without a god. I know
That somewhere there must be a natural god,
A god who 's higher than mere human lust,
Or human paltering, or human guile;
A spirit universal with ourselves,—
Who is not of our prayers, but of our lives:
A something changeless, endless, fixed and just.
The reach of heaven would be unbearably
A chill, unfriendly, frightening thing without him....
I 'll hear you tell of your kind formless one.
He 'll need be something more than a mere man-god
To fill the dreadful void within my soul.

Peter:

I 'll tell you of the kingdom of our Father.

Samuel:

I heard yon Jesus speak of that, last night.
" Behold the kingdom of God is within you! "
Appalling truth!....
Not there, nor there, nor there, nor at some time,
But now, and here, within this brow, this breast,
On this quick tongue, in this offensive arm,

In every deed, in every smallest thought.
Appalling truth!....
How have I reigned within this awesome realm,
In which my will has punished the divine?
What is my score? I know....
[Points at his own eyes]
Look into me. What do you see?
[Peter does not answer]
Speak! Speak!

Peter:

The gleam of cunning.

Samuel:

It has not died? It lives?
[Approaches MARY]
What do my vestments tell?
[MARY continues to stare outward. SAMUEL turns to PETER]
To you, good friend?

Peter:

They sing of riotous plenty.
[SAMUEL tears his clothing from himself]

Samuel:

Off and off!
Your lewdness shouts abroad my horrible skill!
[Gouges at his own eyes]
You knowing beads! Forego your glint! Be dark!
[PETER grasps his hands. They struggle]
They shame me, friend. Will you not tear them out?

Peter:

Nay: let me, rather, cure you.

Samuel:

The physician
Who'd bring me balm, must bring another mind.
This one affronts the heavens and the earth.
Regard me closely while I weep,—and laugh.
Laugh, Hell, until your caverns rock and crash!
But let none pity me. I butchered pity.
Were she to finger me, I 'd drip her clots.

Peter:

Where pity fails, love still may freely move.

Samuel:

Love? Here?

Peter:

Of us, and in our Father's name,
Who lives within you.

Samuel:

If I could say you "No!"
I preened myself as wise, but was most stupid
Of all the dull stupidity called man.
For, puttering with lies, I missed the truth:
The element,—the one supreme essential.
In the smug putridness of my conceit,
I wrought and fought to mould men to my kind;
But mine own self, in whom all godhood lives,
How did I build for that dread tenancy?
How did I mould myself? Foul, leprous structure!
Would you were cinders of some angry fire!

[PETER places his hand soothingly on SAMUEL'S shoulder]

Peter:

In this corruption dwells the Spirit, too.
Behold, the kingdom of God is within you!

[SAMUEL takes ESTHER'S hand]

Samuel:

My daughter! O my daughter! O my daughter!
[*to Peter*]
I have been badly taught. Come: teach me you.
I think that I need to be born anew.
The world,—the world needs to be born anew!

Mary:

The miracle!

Curtain

[The lights begin to come on, then darken]

POSTLUDE

Third Voice:

Pst! Pst! Good friends; 't is but a play you 've seen:—
A whimpering, mawkish play; fit to amuse,
But not to enter keen, or cultured minds.
The soul? The spirit? What have they to do
With clever, money-making business-men,
Or ladies who gauge life by dalliance?
Pooh! Such things are for weaklings: large-eyed dreamers,—
Or,—those of certain vision. . . . They? They are different. . . .
They are. . . . O, well,—why bother?
Forget it! Go to your shifty schemes and plots,
Your assignations, cheatings, bargainings,
Your snarlings, profitings and mutual lies,
Your secret plannings and evasive thoughts:
For,—no one knows, except eternity
And I. Just we. . . .
Some are who pry too closely. Spit on them!
Is there not happiness? Is there not sweetness?
Are there not little birds that sing and twitter,
And troubadours who twiddle wholesome twaddle?
Do you not dance, and prance, and pick gay flowers?
Well, then? Why vilify this gracious world?
The skin is fair. Why nose for what 's the core? . . . .
That only goes to nurture discontent:
A state that 's unrespectable. I say:—
A state that 's unrespectable . . . . What? Jesus?
O, yes . . . . But he was long ago. You have seen:

They crucified him. Yes,—the decent people.
What else was there to do? He was a nuisance
In the long past, as he would be this day.
Of course. . . . Now listen, you—and hear good sense,
In children's words, and in unsoftened phrases.
For, I have no more patience for pretense.
To be of the supernal is to suffer
The pangs of a new birth. . . . It is to change
From beasts, intent on getting, having, holding,
To rapturous spirits, bent on serving, giving.
And that you 'll not.

What? Shall the pig give up his trough, or you
The fine voluptuousness of swills? No—no!
'T is not for this that you and I are here!. . . .
My faithful bondmen:—battle, hate and trade!
Be you two-fisted! Swagger! Conquer! Conquer!

Strive on for gold, and mutual respect
Of what you are. Go on, my lovely herd,—
And if one pause to question, or to think,
Laugh! Draw contemptuous lips, and in the squalor

Of your superior scented mental sewage,
Gibe, ridicule, or smash him with a law!
Go home. . . . 'T was but a play. Ho, ho, ho, ho!
My lovely sweating children,—wallow on!
Go rear up doughty sons to be brave soldiers,
And to be killed or kill; what matters it,
So there are corpses: many green-white corpses,
And blushing maids for rape, and for the brothel?

The jealous god Jehovah rules the earth:
The god of slaughter, doctrine, rite and spell:
The haughty, sniffing, changing, prayer-moved god;

The god of obscuration, mystery. . . .
Who is that god? I 'll never tell it you. . . .
I 'll never tell it. . . .

Good Pharisees and Scribes,—go home in peace.
Go home,—go home,—sweet loves. Forget it all,—
And laugh. 'T was but a play,—a silly play!
Ho, ho, ho, ho, a silly play! Forget it!

WHILE a proposition for the production of this play was being discussed, it appeared that the author would not be able to meet the actors of the company in person. Thereupon, he wrote a communication to be read to them on his behalf. It was then suggested that the paper be made a part of the printed book. After some abridgement of the text, this has been done.

IN the Prefatory Notes to the complete book, I addressed two paragraphs to the actors.

But, there are some additional thoughts that I should like to convey to those who are to present this play as a living thing. These thoughts, and the conclusions and directions that flow from them, I claim the right to express only in so far as they have to do with my own work.

The "Grand Manner" and "Modernism."

You are urged to treat the lines of this play frankly as verse. When the situation permits, it would please me to have them decently declaimed, despite the frowns of the learned critics. At appropriate moments, I should even like to have your acting tend toward that "grand manner" which is so obnoxious to a certain snub-nosed "modernism." In any event, I urge that you so indicate your emotions that they will be fully evident. By all means ignore the convention that permits the actor to depict a cataclysmic passion by no physical manifestation more violent than the slight twitching of his own eye-brow, or the moderate acceleration of his own pulse.

We know that the dictatorship of the drab has succeeded in practically emptying the auditoriums of all theatres except those that present pornography, sugared flummery, mystery, or grotesqueness,—a result which seems to have been achieved, among other things, by a pretense of devotion to an ideal of "repression." As I see it, this particular fad represents the attenuation to the point of absurdity of the shading of expression that Garrick reasonably exploited. So far as

actual life is concerned, we all know that man is still vehement in ardor; that he still rants in fury; and that he even still poetizes.

Naturalism

Much is said, these days, about naturalism. But it seems to me that the naturalism of the stage must be the naturalism of art, which is never mere reflection, a much over-quoted mood of Shakespeare's to the contrary notwithstanding. Indeed, Shakespeare's own compositions argue the opposite to the familiar lines in Hamlet.

I say nothing new when I affirm that it is not the business of the stage to image life, but to create the illusion of life; that it is not the function of the stage to enact intimacy, but to create the illusion of intimacy. You know that there is a world of difference between these things. It is a difference as great as that which lies between assigning a role to an artist able to express it, and assigning it to a hack who approximates its conception in mere physical type,—a method of casting in which the theatre has been all too swift to follow the moving-picture shops. These things have been said before by many earnest students of the stage who have not brought to the consideration of the subject the obsession of a pet theory. I repeat them only because repetition seems necessary.

The Duty of The Speaking Stage

This play was written for the speaking stage. The speaking stage does not mean the mumbling stage. I beg, then, that you will deliver the lines so that all who are in the theatre can hear what I have written. This will make it possible for them fairly to decide whether they do or do not like it. If one of the self-declared "judicious" thereupon accuses you of "shouting," answer him that the best part of your audience is occupying chairs far back of the fourth row centre of the orchestra. How many times, of late years, while seated among the more modest theatre visitors, have I heard

them express the plaintive wish that they, too, might be permitted to know all the matters with which the actors were concerning themselves on the stage.

The Nature of the Verse

As to the word-structure of this book:—I have attempted, here, to make attractive to the casual ear of the twentieth century that wondrously musical, rhythmic and metric English which served as the medium of the great craftsmen in letters who made the name of a mere contemporary queen a household word among all peoples. To do this, almost everything has been sacrificed but the meaning, the cadence, and the timing of the lines. Our daily conversations are not now carried on in figures. We do not, today, think in images. A sentence of involved terms,—a cumulative adjectival structure,—a simile that departs from strict parallelism,—none of these carries to the momentary listener. That which we call "civilization" seems to have disassociated our mental processes from these forms. So, in this play, using the heroic verse only because it seems best fitted to the purposes of the task, I have striven for the simple expression, and the avoidance of imagery. I have to admit that I have not been wholly successful in this effort, for the pen has run away with me at times, and I have lacked determination to excise to the bone, even in the acting edition.

I hope that the things I have just said will not cause you to think that I am unappreciative of the fact that there are many who still like, and instantly understand, the Jonsonian, the Miltonian, and so on. The fact is, however, that these do not constitute the mass of the people. And my own basis of measurement of any success that this particular play may attain will be the population of the top balcony of the playhouse in which the public is invited to judge it.

An Experiment in Harmonic English

I give you, then, here, an experiment in what, perhaps, for want of a better term, I might designate

CALIFORNIA

as harmonic composition of English, set out in as direct a way as my own poor ability in versification, and the requirements of the subject, have made possible. The intention has been to have the text instantly comprehensible to any person who fairly understands the language. Whether I have been even moderately successful in achieving that at which I have aimed, time alone can prove. It is self-evident that the location of the exact point of that incidence between the inspirational, the purely lyric, and the prose forms which will make feasible the successful public presentation of plays, on the English-speaking stage, in this practically moribund medium, is a matter of an adjustment so fine that it is to be measured only by the most minute of psychologic micrometers. It means the evolvement of a practically new style. In the pentameter, it will call for an indefinably proper shifting of the pause, and the most varying adaptation of the breaks and changes of the measure to the action. In all verse, it will mean a technically precise placement of the vowel and consonant values of the words themselves, and, in the longer passages, an almost scientific distribution of the breathing periods. These, and many other problems, that will have to be solved with the building of every line, can not even be worked on without the constant co-operation of intelligent and deeply concerned interpreters. But, if ever someone does do the composing well, and able expression follows, how grateful a service will have been rendered to our beautiful language!

Assurances that have come from those who know the theatre lead me to believe that a start has been made here in the molding of the style, or form, I have just described. I can not, of course, expect to do more than that. But I can hope that your representation of what I have written will inspire others to carry on to a point approaching perfection.

244.7
G862
Gregory, O.
Jesus; the tragedy
of man
apr. 1 August

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G86.2